



EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS FOR  
SOCIAL INCLUSION: EXAMINING  
COGNITIONS, EMOTIONS AND SOCIAL  
DISPOSITIONS

by

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

Rosemary Ac

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## ABSTRACT

Currently, in Australia and overseas, the term “social inclusion” is widely used within social policy to inform thinking and practice as a means to reduce inequalities. In the area of education policy, a key goal is to strengthen social inclusion by encouraging parents with pre-school children to engage in socio-educational and community support services. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs strive to provide equal opportunities for all children and particularly target families at risk of exclusion. This research examines whether social skill acquisition can be assumed as mostly a cognitive choice/awareness or if emotional influences prevail and inhibit social inclusion for some people. It is argued that social policy strategies and educational practices may benefit from two theoretical approaches: Bourdieu’s notion that a person’s social dispositions can elicit exclusion if not conducive with dominant culturally-defined expectations; and Bowlby’s attachment theory, explaining the emotional foundation of social inclusion and exclusion. Qualitative research methods, involving practitioner interviews and parent discussions, were used in this research to develop some understandings about the facilitation of social inclusion. Data were collected across two sites, Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centres (CFCs), both situated in low socio-economic (SES) areas in Tasmania, Australia. Major themes arising from the data were theoretically analysed by applying sociological and attachment theories. The overall findings were that regularly participating parents appeared cognitively aware of the benefits and chose to engage in the programs with an expectation of socio-educational rewards for both themselves and their children. Conversely, those who were disinclined to participate seemed to experience negative emotional feelings in unfamiliar social groups/settings. This research is significant as it extends and refines understanding of the emotional side of social inclusion. A more in-depth understanding of the emotional aspect of social inclusion, within ECEC approaches, is hoped to strengthen participation in early childhood/family support programs.

**Key words:** Early childhood, Social inclusion, Attachment, Social dispositions, Peer relations, Cognitions, Emotional regulation

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines how Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services are promoting social inclusion by encouraging participation in programs, such as Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centres (CFCs) in Tasmania. As the social inclusion goal, within ECEC approaches, is to improve socio-economic wellbeing, this thesis explores the relationship between early social learning and societal inclusion. The purpose is, therefore, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the concept of social inclusion and explore the complexity of social behaviour. The theoretical approach draws on sociological and attachment theories in examining both societal and individual issues around social inclusion. The research design involves interviews of LiL and CFC practitioners and regularly-attending parents, from which data are thematically categorised and theoretically analysed. The purpose of this research is to gain knowledge to assist ECEC approaches in ensuring parents and children, especially those in most need, are afforded the most beneficial social support by regularly attending these programs.

The ideas framing this research grew out of personal experience of childhood social exclusion during the 1950/60s, ensuing parenting and life experiences and work in the Education, Child Protection and Criminal Court areas. This background has led to an academic interest in sociological and attachment theories, which provide insight into the importance of acquiring appropriate social skills, early, in order to attain the meaningful relationships needed for social inclusion.

Life experiences and reflections have made sense of Bowlby's (1973, 1982, 1979) theory, which states that the initial social experience occurs in the pre-verbal stage of life where social cue interpretation and emotional regulation ability are forged. From a sociological perspective these ideas support Bourdieu's (1984) suggestion that early-acquired dispositions lay the foundations of being socially included or excluded. To this end, the study explores these theories to gain a richer understanding of bases of social behaviours and explain how social exclusion and inequality may occur, even in the most democratic societies.

Contemporary ECEC programs, such Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centres (CFCs), follow the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) based on the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR, 2009) guidelines. LiL and CFCs, the subject of this study, have been implemented as a means to curb social exclusion by encouraging parents with pre-school children to participate in these programs. The major difference between the two services is that LiL is more time-framed and attached

to a primary school while CFCs, although often close to a primary school, follow a community integrated and less structured format.

Further literature explains how social inclusion ideas of fairness, autonomy (Wong & Turner, 2014), non-discrimination and acceptance of diversity and equality (Wong et al., 2012; Theobald et al., 2013) define educational strategies in Australia. Educational reform is now relied upon to achieve a more socially inclusive society (Watson, 2009). In view of these educational goals, this study examines how social inclusion may be facilitated within ECEC educational and family support programs. While Lil and CFC programs are the subject of this research, a critical lens is primarily focussed on examining understandings of the concept of social inclusion as a way to reduce disadvantage<sup>1</sup>. This critical examination applies ideas about social dispositions and early childhood development, advanced by sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu and psychoanalyst, John Bowlby.

For the purpose of this thesis, the term “social inclusion” denotes feelings of belonging within social groups. Conversely, the term “social inclination” is used to describe a propensity and tendency towards social interaction. “Social disposition” relates to the Bourdieuan idea of *habitus* and refers to a person’s early-cultivated manner of behaving. The phrase “social skill” describes a person’s capability to interpret and respond positively to social cues and interactions. These terminologies are used in this research to refer to slightly different but interconnected concepts.

The major question posed in this research is “What are contemporary understandings of social inclusion in ECEC approaches in Tasmania?” From this question, three sub-questions arise, which are: (1) How can Bourdieuan and Bowlbian theories assist in promoting more understanding of the meaning of social inclusion/exclusion, (2) What insights can be gained from practitioners and parents, concerning whether, and when, social behaviour is a cognitive choice or predominantly an emotional issue, (3) How can better understandings of socially-acquired dispositions, in the context of historical and cultural factors, assist ECEC approaches in facilitating enhanced social inclusion outcomes for families?

Explorations of the way emotionally-driven social dispositions are acquired, and may influence social inclusion, form the background of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “disadvantage” is complex but when used in this thesis denotes social inclusion barriers

## **Aim of Research**

The aim of this research is to examine contemporary understandings of the way social inclusiveness can be enhanced within ECEC programs and, in doing so, consider emotional influences as impacting on social inclinations for those people who may experience exclusion. The facilitation of social inclusion is now purported to involve the promotion of fairness, autonomy (Wong & Turner, 2014), non-discrimination and acceptance of diversity and equality (Wong et al., 2012; Theobald et al., 2013). A key challenge in implementing educational strategies, however, is to identify how programs can minimise, rather than exacerbate, social exclusion (Watson, 2009).

The underlying purpose of this research is, therefore, to enhance understanding of the concept of social inclusion by applying theories and examining the effects of historico-cultural practices culminating in contemporary ECEC approaches. Theories will be interwoven with practitioner and parent accounts of their involvement in ECEC social inclusion programs, LiL and CFCs. Information gained from the research is sought to contribute positively to the facilitation of social inclusion by highlighting the issue of emotions. Recently, the issue of emotional regulation/control has become a focus in early childhood programs, because of evidence showing that it is linked to adult health, wealth and crime outcomes (Moffitt et al., 2011).

The emergence of ECEC services to support families with pre-school children is in keeping with Australia's policy focus to target those at risk of social exclusion (Wong & Turner, 2014). The role of these services is to enhance socio-educational and employment outcomes for all children, especially those from socially isolated familial environments (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009). Being mindful of the role of these programs, this research conceptualises the idea of social inclusion from both an individual (ethological and psychoanalytical) perspective, as proposed by Bowlby (1982), and through a sociological lens, as expressed by Bourdieu (1984). Their theories both show that social inclusion may not be a simple choice, taken upon gaining information and access to services. That is, social inclusion seems to relate to an early childhood acquisition of social behavioural dispositions, which influence social distinctions and inclinations throughout life.

Taking these theoretical approaches, in education, may be helpful to explore how teachers'/practitioners' expectations and practice styles may generate variations in children's and parents' socio-educational attainments. These perspectives may also provide understanding of the way inequalities occur (Nash, 1990). Bourdieu's (1984) view is that

inequalities can occur, because neither the dominant class, nor the disadvantaged groups, are aware of the other's social world. His remark suggests that myopic thinking may pervade culturally and politically dominant ideas of wellbeing, which serve to dictate the parameters of what is assumed to be a good life. Sociological and attachment theories are, therefore, used in this research to highlight the influence of historico-cultural practices and assess how contemporary ECEC approaches, incorporating social inclusion strategies, may reduce inequalities and enhance wellbeing.

### **Summary of Chapters**

Chapter 1 of this thesis consists of an overview which provides a map of key issues that relate to the research focus, including historical practices leading to contemporary socio-educational policy aims. This chapter describes LiL and CFCs, which have been implemented, in Tasmania, as part of Australia's integrated ECEC programs. These programs focus on inclusive practices with a concentration on issues of identity, culture, gender, self-regulation and cognitive awareness (Theobald et al., 2013). Early childhood education strategies adhere to The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The EYLF forms part of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) reform agenda which aims to provide nationally consistent quality early childhood education, accessible to all families.

The overview in chapter 1 includes a discussion of research findings from studies of early childhood programs and the challenge of high attrition rates for some parents who report feeling pilloried (Watson et al., 2005; Blakemore et al., 2009; Aylward & McNeill, 2009). This chapter also illuminates the different emphases placed on the importance of one's early experiences when taking either an attachment or ecological systems view of social learning.

Chapter 2 turns to the literature in examining the nature of social inclusion and exclusion and the underlying reasons motivating behaviours (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). A key focus of this chapter is to examine Bourdieu's (1984) idea that social dispositions are drivers of social action, derived from historical habitual behaviours and having become second nature. Chapter 2 explores the notion that social behaviour requires understanding the relationship between the individual's predispositions, understandings and behaviours, in response to social structures (Bourdieu, 1984). Literature, critiquing Bourdieuan theories on social inclusion/dispositions, is also included.

To illustrate the various ways of viewing social inclusion, chapter 2 includes a review of cross-disciplinary ideas used to explain the way social/non-social behaviours develop or may be deterred. These variances show how social behaviour may be viewed as a response to either operant and/or classical conditioning. Chapter 2 outlines the diverse perceptions, which determine whether social behaviour may be assumed as an instrumental, rational choice or an emotionally-triggered reciprocal issue.

In chapter 3 the theoretical framework is discussed to examine a possible link between early attachment experience and social inclinations. This chapter includes past and present critiques of attachment theory and the influence of prevailing cultural and political ideas. The key issue for chapter 3 is to highlight the way relationship skills may be implicit in being socially included, and the implications for ECEC social inclusion programs.

The methodology set out in chapter 4 adheres to Mason's (2002) advice for reflective examination of one's world view in deciding the best way to pose questions about social action. The ontological view framing the research relates to a critical realist paradigm, in conceding that reality and truth exist, but are beyond the grasp of the researcher. The assumption, inherent in this research, is that the mind and brain are interconnected but separate entities; the former relating to emotions and the latter to cognitions.

Mason (2002) suggests that research is not merely a matter of trying to solve puzzles but about making an argument. Consequently, for this research theory and data were examined together rather than deductively or inductively. Chapter 4 endeavours to link the theories and assumptions framing the research and explains why practitioner interviews and parent discussions were chosen as opposed to other educational research methods. The advantages and limitations inherent in the research are also discussed.

For this study a lesser number of parents were interviewed to add their personal experiences and perspectives. A review of qualitative research methods, edited by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), explains how these methods are used by many disciplines and traditions as an effective way of examining routine or problematic moments in time. Although measurable evidence is often sought by legislators, scientific methods are described as unsuitable in trying to decipher the complexities of human social behaviour (Erickson, 2011).

The latter part of chapter 4 describes the practical issues in recruiting participants and reasons for conducting a pilot interview. The study was carried out over a twelve month period with participants contacted six months after the initial meeting to cover any relevant follow-up. After data collection the recorded interviews were analysed "in order to create

summary descriptions” (Babbie, 2002, p. 90). The two units of analyses are (1) the concept of social inclusion in terms of emotionally-driven social dispositions and (2) practitioner and parent perspectives based on their involvement in Lil and CFC programs.

Chapter 5 presents the data gained from practitioner interviews and parent discussions about their experiences in ECEC programs. This chapter is divided into two sections, (1) practitioner perspectives and (2) parent accounts. Chapter 6 concentrates on both practitioners’ and parents’ views on emotional behaviours based on their experiences and understanding of social inclusion. The transcribed version of the recorded interviews and discussions were thematically categorised by organising information into the most common themes arising from the data. These themes were analysed theoretically.

A discussion of the practitioner/parent information, in terms of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984) and attachment (Bowlby, 1973, 1982) theories, follows in chapter 7. This chapter explores how these theories link with the research findings and address the research question.

Chapter 8 provides a conclusion which encompasses research and policy implications and further research suggestions. In summary, the research finds that different ways of thinking may influence social policy in framing ways to reduce social exclusion, promote emotional regulation and ensure social wellbeing outcomes for families. The ECEC aim is to enhance parent-child bonding and emotional regulation while simultaneously offering long day childcare to ensure equality in the workplace (Theobald et al., 2013). The conclusion of this research highlights the need for more nuanced understandings of the complexities of social inclusion behaviours in both individuals and their societies.

It is argued that societal wellbeing may not be properly measured solely by economic factors. This is evident in increasing levels of social isolation, psychosocial and emotional difficulties in Australia, despite vast improvements in living standards (Moore, 2007). For example, the Telethon Institute (Lawrence, 2015) and AEDC (2016) findings show that emotional problems, anxiety and depression are increasing in very young children in Australia. As Bowlby (1988) predicted, a concentration on economic goals may not guarantee enhanced social wellbeing. Bourdieu (1990a) also states that there is a difference between economic and psychosocial wellbeing and it cannot be presumed that one always precedes the other.

Although Lil and CFC, ECEC programs have been implemented specifically to facilitate social inclusion, practitioners in this study stated that the parents who seem to find difficulty in socialising were mostly disinclined to attend. By contrast, the regularly-

attending parents, who participated in this study, all expressed their eagerness to gain opportunities to learn, to socialise and benefit from resources.

To follow, chapter 1 provides an overview of LiL and CFC programs and studies of other similar ECEC services. The history of early childhood services and emergence of the concept of social inclusion are also examined against the contemporary ECEC social inclusion focus.



## **CHAPTER 1 - OVERVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

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This chapter describes Tasmania's Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centre (CFC) programs and reviews studies of other ECEC services in Australia. The issue of participation is also examined in view of the policy aims of EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) which are to implement an early education curriculum to improve socio-educational opportunities and outcomes for all children. EYLF guidelines seek to uncover the real nature of inclusion by not targeting any particular child or age-group, but by focusing on diversity and equality. Early childhood educational pathways to social inclusion now seek to deliver socio-economic wellbeing outcomes for children, by adhering to democratic ideas of equality and fairness as the means to reduce disadvantage (Aylward & McNeill, 2009). The ideas framing ECEC services are based on the perceived need to integrate early childhood and family supports; that is to include childcare and focus on issues of power, identity, gender and cultural diversity (Theobald et al., 2013).

To provide a background of the research topic, this chapter includes an exploration of historical factors around parenting, early childhood services and changing perceptions on the notion of social inclusion. The research, however, contrasts with the cognitive notion of thinking about external issues of social exclusion and, instead highlights the way emotions are implicit in social skills/inclusion. It is acknowledged that these are complex issues, and there are no simple policy solutions. Nevertheless the Social Inclusion Agenda (Australian Government, 2010) states a need to create a fairer society where all citizens have an equal opportunity to feel valued and able to participate in community life (Wong & Turner, 2014). To address these social inclusion goals, early childhood initiatives, such as the Tasmanian Education Department's ECEC programs, LiL and CFCs, are now operating in Tasmania, Australia.

### **1.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The purpose of programs, such as CFCs, is outlined in the Tasmanian Education Department website (2011). The website states that CFCs have been implemented in response to indicators of worsening health and developmental outcomes in Australian children. These outcomes have precipitated a need to encourage families to participate in support programs to curb social exclusion trends. In knowing the importance of the early years, participation is

encouraged by making ECEC centres accessible and welcoming, especially for families living in low socio-economic status (SES) environments. Besides facilitating social inclusion for families, another key goal of ECEC services is for children to gain social competence before starting school. For this purpose practitioners are expected to reinforce desirable social behaviours by using humanist communicating practices (Watson et al., 2005). The need for parents to engage with children is one of the priorities of ECEC programs (DEEWR, 2009).

One program, specifically aimed at improving parent-child attachments, has been examined by Aylward and McNeill (2009). Their study notes that difficulties arise in facilitating social inclusion, particularly for the families who most need assistance. Similarly a study of early support programs by Watson et al. (2005) finds that, despite easy access, the parents most likely to attend are those who already possess a degree of self-worth and autonomy. Although pre-school services are aimed at reducing inequality and fostering more inclusive communities, families who most benefit seem to be those in the least need of help (Blakemore et al., 2009).

Nevertheless the contemporary idea is that easy access to community supports can be a way to enhance social inclusion and thus reduce levels of socio-educational disadvantage (DEEWR, 2009). A need for support programs has arisen in Australia because, despite improvements in economic and welfare standards, social inclusion rates are declining (Moore, 2009). A recent survey of Australian children's mental health and wellbeing shows high levels of anxiety and depressive disorders evident in children, particularly those from one-parent or foster families (Lawrence et al., 2015). The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (2016) shows escalating emotional difficulties for young children despite improvements in their cognitive skills. To address these trends, the social policy focus is to reduce inequality and improve emotional wellbeing, by ensuring families with pre-school children can participate in ECEC social inclusion programs (Wong & Turner, 2014).

Wong and Turner (2014) suggest that the difficulty, in seeking to promote a more socially inclusive society, is in the various constructs of the term "social inclusion". They suggest that "social inclusion" is now understood as a way to promote acceptance of diversity and to reduce discrimination and inequality by ensuring opportunities for participation and inclusion. So, while the traditional perception of disadvantage referred mainly to people's lack of monetary resources, the present interpretation is that poverty encompasses exclusion from opportunities to participate in social life and decision-making (Wong & Turner, 2014).

Long (2010) adds that the concept of social inclusion can be perceived as an absolute term or relative to whether a person has the capabilities/wherewithal to utilise opportunities for socio-economic success. The absolute notion, that social inclusion can enhance opportunities to participate and have a voice in the community, is contingent on a person's social dispositions being autonomous; that is, they display a certain level of self-assurance (Wong & Turner, 2014).

The societal perspective, Wong and Turner (2014) suggest, is that social inclusion depends on participation, an acceptance of diversity and promotion of democratic principles of equality. Taking the individual viewpoint, however, the idea that one's early attachment experience plays a major role in the development of socially inclusive dispositions is seldom mentioned. What is often omitted is the effect of historical practices, which may likely have left many parents with a fragile foundation upon which to ensure their children are able to experience an optimum early social experience (Bowlby, 1988). As Bowlby (1988) states, adults who experience difficulty in providing secure attachment experiences for their children have usually suffered social deprivation in their own childhood. Historical impacts on early cultivated dispositions thus need to be included (Bourdieu, 1990a).

### *1.1.1 History of Parenting and Social Inclusion*

From the 1950s social trends in Tasmania and mainland Australia, during the post-war Baby Boom era, were similar to those in the United Kingdom (UK) where the nuclear family was the norm. During this period orphanages and institutions were common-place and unmarried mothers were encouraged, often coerced, to relinquish their babies<sup>2</sup>. At the same time thousands of poor and orphaned children were removed from the UK and sent to live in institutions in Australia. Indigenous children also suffered greatly from parental separation.

The negative impacts of the settler cultural practice of removing Indigenous children are still felt through the generations, as stated by the National Sorry Day Council (NSDC, 2015). The removal of children from their familial environment resulted in the most devastating repercussions for generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples (The Stolen Generation fact sheet, 2015). The fact sheet shows the present-day effects of historical separation of children from their families as being (1) higher incidences of adolescents

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<sup>2</sup> Prior to the introduction of the Supporting Mother's Benefit (1973) in Australia, unwed mothers mostly adopted out their new-borns. From July 1968 to June 1980 it is estimated that 35,000 non-relative adoptions took place, with a peak of almost 10,000 between 1971 and 1972. Since the 1920s a total of 250,000 adoptions are believed to have occurred, causing long-term effects to parents, children and adoptees (Higgins, 2010).

coming to the attention of police, (2) high rates of low self-esteem, depression and mental illnesses, (3) vulnerability to physical, emotional and sexual abuse, (4) history of rejection of Aboriginal culture/identity, (5) inability to maintain links with the land, and (6) inability to be involved in community cultural/spiritual life. The NSDC (2015) explains that, because many Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families, they were unable to maintain contact with community groups. These practices were enforced in the belief that children would have opportunities to gain a better education, grow up in a more loving family environment and absorb Anglo values (NSDC, 2015). In reality most Aboriginal children were employed as cheap labour in servile positions. Consequently many descendants of the “Stolen Generation” are still suffering resentments and deep spiritual hurt (NSDC, 2015).

In the 1950s dismissive practices towards the needs of very young children also included not permitting parents to stay with their sick children in hospital. Bowlby (1988) reflected that people in less developed societies seemed more attune to children’s need to be close to their primary caregiver, especially in times of stress. This proximity need was mostly ignored in rich western countries until new hospital regimes revised their practices in the 70s (Holmes, 1993).

By the early 1970s trends in western countries, such as Australia, heralded new independence for women with the introduction of the contraceptive pill providing easy fertility control. At this time no-fault divorce legislation (*Family Law Act*, 1975) was passed, welfare provisions made available for single parents and childcare facilities promoted for working mothers. Societal responses to family structure also changed from the pre-1970s, where low cost housing incentives enabled many young couples to purchase homes. In comparison, the current situation is that vast welfare housing estates are located primarily in outer suburban areas and mostly occupied by sole-parent renters (Lewis, 2000).

While this thesis does not suggest a causal link between single parenthood and problematic social wellbeing outcomes, a report from Tasmania’s Commissioner for Children (2013) indicates challenges associated with the single-parent family unit. The report cites single-parent families, unemployment, substance abuse, mental health issues and a history of family violence as implicit in social isolation. When compared with the general population of Australia, Tasmania’s rates of illiteracy, single parenthood, unemployment, psychological stress, nicotine addiction and alcohol/drug abuse are among the highest (ABS, 2010, 2012, 2014). Social exclusion levels in Tasmania are found to be in urgent need of attention, according to The Social Inclusion Strategy report (Department of Premier and Cabinet,

Tasmania, 2009). The report states that the number of Tasmanian families being dependent on government allowances increased from 31.5 per cent to 34.1 per cent from 2005 to 2008, which represents the highest rate per capita in Australia. In seeking to eliminate social exclusion, issues relating to labour-market participation and environmental factors are often cited (Long, 2010). For instance, the report states that 13 per cent of Tasmanians live on or below the poverty line with the number of children living in a jobless family increasing from 16.3 per cent in 1997 to 21.6 per cent in 2006. Tasmania is described as the having the second highest number of people in Australia living in highly disadvantaged areas where there is a three-fold increase in the number of people facing barriers to social inclusion. To relieve this situation the report relies on early childhood education strategies, involving parental involvement, as a means to enhance community engagement and social harmony.

The following table outlines a general chronology of cultural norms, policy incentives and possible impacts on parenting practices in Tasmania, Australia, over five decades.

**Table 1: Culturally-defined Social Policy Impact on Parenting Practices**

<b>Post-war era to 2015</b>	<b>Cultural Norm/Policy Approach</b>	<b>Parenting Style Impact</b>
<b>PRIOR to 2015</b>	Nuclear Family	Long term attachments
<b>Incentives</b>	Low cost housing for couples	Encourages relationships
<b>Disincentives</b>	Minimal welfare/support for single parents Un-married mothers culturally unacceptable	Psychological distress for adopted children and relinquishing mothers – Childhood attachment stress
<b>POST 1970</b>	No-fault divorce legislation (1975)	Increases in fractured relationships/step-parenting
<b>Incentives</b>	Housing and welfare support for single parents Baby bonus payments  Parenting and family supports to facilitate social inclusion	Supports single-parenting and blended families May encourage reproductive decisions for at-risk families  ECEC support encourages attachments
<b>Disincentives</b>	Adult independence and equality prioritised over child's needs	Child's attachment stress Future psychosocial issues

*Note: This table is only a guide to outline the possible impact of historical, policy and cultural changes*

As Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) state, the contemporary mission for early childhood services is to help families and, by doing so, ensure that young children thrive by being given an early years grounding. They add that this early grounding is known to be important for children to flourish socially and educationally; that is, for them to achieve successful relationships and future participation in the workplace. The difficulty, however, in achieving social inclusion goals within early childhood strategies and practices, is to be able to harness both scholarly knowledge and practitioner insights (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). Educational knowledge together with practitioner insights is, therefore, needed to ensure the implementation of appropriate social policy initiatives and strategies. The challenge lies, Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) suggest, in being able to enhance individual and societal wellbeing without perpetrating unintended consequences. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) curriculum guidelines state that the goal of ECEC services is to increase inclusivity by providing families with supports and enhancing socio-educational opportunities for pre-school children. This current strategy (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009) contrasts with varying ideas on early childhood over history, and resulting strategies for pre-school program implementation (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000).

### *1.1.2 History of Early Childhood Ideas and Services*

Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) describe how perspectives on early childhood have changed over the centuries. They note that the concept of early childhood was once based on Rousseau's (1712-78) idea that this stage is a unique period where spontaneous learning occurs. Later, the European *laissez-faire* approach was to allow the unspoiled nature of the child to unfold; this approach was unlike the strict disciplinary methods proposed by the Puritans in America (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the religion-based German kindergarten model began operating as a pre-school service in Australia. In contrast, the UK nursery school service favoured a medico-educational model. While parental involvement was initially an important feature of these nursery schools, Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) note that they became a childcare service for the working poor during the 1920s Depression era in the UK. They illustrate how childcare centres, in recent times, now provide for the care and education of pre-school children, especially for working parents.

Over the years, ideas and practices have all had the purpose of fulfilling various needs and views as to the most beneficial way to tackle early childhood issues (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). Maternal child health services, for example, were initially implemented in order to enlighten parents on ways to improve their child's health outcomes. This idea was overtaken

by the behaviourist notion, emphasising the operant conditioning, environmental aspect of learning, and which instigated the “cognitive revolution” of the 1950s and 60s. Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) suggest, however, that behaviourists do not attempt to explain the possibility of instincts motivating behaviour in children. Alternatively, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1982) highlights the significance of the child’s tie to their mother-figure<sup>3</sup> as an instinctive survival mechanism. The most interesting factor is that, although the idea of childhood attachment is widely accepted, the emphases placed on the primacy of the initial attachment experience seem to vary (Scott, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1974) ecological systems theory, for example, promotes the notion of the child in context rather than in isolation and, therefore, does not exclusively focus on the initial attachment experience. It is Bronfenbrenner’s (1974) view that the child responds to each specific environment rather than acquiring social behaviours during infancy, as Bowlby (1988) suggests. Drawing on the scientific method, where change is introduced to reveal the impact of strategies, the early childhood Head Start Program, based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1974) ecological theory, has been implemented in disadvantaged communities in the United States of America (US). Although this type of early intervention promised to improve the lives of disadvantaged children, Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) note that rates of welfare dependency, school failure and delinquency did not seem to decline. Nevertheless, by adhering to ecological systems theory as part of a social action strategy to reduce poverty, early education programs have been operating for over four decades in the US (Gordon & Browne, 2011). The early education initiative initially followed a “compensatory” type program based on the idea that some children are not prepared for the demands of school. Gordon and Browne (2011) note that a more pluralistic perspective has now been taken to encompass a “cultural difference” model, which promotes the idea that no way of behaving or believing should be required for successful participation.

Evaluative studies of early childhood programs, in the United States of America, state that children who participate in early childhood programs are less likely to require special education classes and that higher IQ levels correlate with pre-school program attendance. Moreover, the cost-effectiveness that these programs are expected to deliver, has had an “enormous impact on policy makers and government officials” in the US (Gordon & Browne, 2011, p. 52). Similarly, early childhood educational services, in Australia, are expected to

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<sup>3</sup> The term “mother-figure” is used in this thesis to refer to the primary caregiver/parent

provide economic benefits in the form of reduced welfare dependence, health and crime costs, all known to be associated with low literacy (Vinson, 2009).

Adhering to the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) curriculum, Australia's early childhood services aim to reduce disadvantage by focusing on the human right to equal educational opportunities. The need to uphold the human rights demand for educational equality requires that inclusive teaching practices deliver both access and equality (Florian, 2008). For practitioners to develop inclusive practices, however, they need to be able to reflect on the way they understand the idea of inclusion. In contrast, Gordon and Browne (2011) suggest that the issue is more about implementing inclusive education practices. They recommend Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in early childhood programs to incorporate knowledge of child development and learning, coupled with an acceptance that each child is an individual from differing social/cultural contexts.

This pluralistic notion promotes acceptance of the value of difference and requires early educators to be responsible in countering the damage from stereotyping. Taking this view, early education practices are required to place importance on maintaining a fully inclusive environment where children can learn and play within routine programs (Gordon & Browne, 2011). It is expected that this approach can encourage early childhood professionals to educate holistically; that is, to concentrate on strengths, interests and individual sociocultural contexts to promote the child's sense of identity.

In Australia ECEC services encompass pre-school and childcare services which operate under the National Quality Framework (NQF) (COAG, 2009) with a focus on the early years. ECEC services operate with an understanding of the way a child's early experience impacts on their future social participation (Theobald et al., 2013). Over recent decades in Australia the focus has shifted from the constructivist child-centred approach of the 1970s to acceptance of the influence of social factors. Drawing on the ideas of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, the social context of learning became predominant in the 1980s in Australia. Theobald et al. (2013) note that in the 1990s issues of identity, power, culture and gender gained attention along with a recognition that the child's environment impacts on their social relationship supports. They explain that the political and pedagogical focus for ECEC is now on diversity and inclusive practices.

Gordon and Browne (2011) suggest that the most important focus in education is inclusiveness which they suggest will ensure that children feel capable and competent in a self-help environment. They add that teachers' professional manner and inclusive attitudes



can ensure children's best interests are taken into account. Children, in this learning environment, are expected to learn to value one another and prepare for upcoming transitions. Following the US message, that education is the key to breaking the poverty cycle, Gordon and Browne (2011) state that practitioners can help children achieve educational success by accepting diversity and encouraging autonomy.

## 1.2 SOCIAL POLICY FOCUS IN AUSTRALIA

The Social Inclusion Agenda (Australian Government, 2010) is specifically aimed at reducing disadvantage by ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate, benefit from education and gain the skills necessary for future earning capabilities. For this reason Caruana and McDonald (2011) advocate that the idea of social inclusion be promoted as a civic issue. They suggest that the goal of the social inclusion agenda is to reduce disadvantage and encourage equality, with an expected outcome of higher levels of economic growth for Australia.

The concept of social inclusion is, therefore, described as encompassing the opportunity for all people to learn and participate in education, training and employment. Participation means being able to engage in family life and with others in the community, as well as taking charge of one's own decision-making. To strengthen social bonds in Australia the policy focus is, therefore, on societal participation and the promotion of equal, respectful treatment of all citizens, Silver (2010) suggests. She adds that the idea of fairness is the cornerstone of Australia's values to ensure all people have opportunities, capabilities and responsibilities to learn, work, connect and have a say. Wong and Turner (2014) caution against social inclusion discourse being understood in terms of poverty reduction, because this can place responsibility, even blame, on the individual. They add that offers of fairness may not always produce equality. Conversely, equality may not always guarantee fairness, the former being measurable and the latter being a subjective contingent concept.

There are two major political parties in Australia; the mostly conservative Liberal Party and the more progressive Labor Party. In 2007 the Labor Party instigated the Social Inclusion Agenda, claiming the previous Liberal Party to be more focused on economic rationalism than social issues (Wong & Turner, 2014). Silver (2010) suggests that, according to Labor values, respect is not merely about good upbringing and manners; a notion she claims relates to the Liberal idea, that preference and discrimination may not be completely eliminated. Silver (2010) argues that social barriers are socially constructed and, as such, can

be eliminated by means of tolerant and respectful educational supports. She suggests that these supports need to operate within the context of expressions of pride for Australia's inclusive values and shame for historical wrongs. Silver (2010) views social exclusion as a process emanating from intergenerational disadvantage and that early childhood education and family support programs can offer a way to reinvigorate socio-economic inclusion. Interestingly, because attachment theory is about early upbringing experiences, it is often critiqued as supporting conservative individualistic ideology in not considering the caregiver's health, social and political needs (Duschinsky et al., 2015). While emphasising the risks of perceiving children's education and care as a utilitarian economic matter, Wong and Turner (2014) do support women's right to work and utilise childcare services for their own, and the nation's, economic benefits.

This thesis supports the notion that social inclusion derives from intergenerational disadvantage, but differs by emphasising the way in which disadvantage is connected to politically and culturally-informed upbringing (parenting) practices. The contemporary assumption is that social inclusion is about creating a more fair and respectful society; namely that everyone *should* have the capabilities, resources and responsibilities to participate in Australia's economic and community life (Silver, 2010). Social inclusion is perceived as two-fold, both a state of having the capabilities to participate and a process of becoming included; the latter being attained by active participation in programs and utilising supports, benefits and resources. The concept of social inclusion appears as a more complex issue, however, and not easily encapsulated by assuming that everyone, in a fair society, can be included by simply accessing supports.

Nash (1999) suggests that sociology can provide understanding to help unravel the complexities inherent in studying social behaviour. For example, sociological research can examine whether a real connection exists between economic and educational production and if so, whether it is because of family connections, social networks or perhaps teaching styles. Ultimately the task of being able to seek the assistance and support necessary to become more socially included requires insight, the knowledge of a need for assistance and the motivation to desire social inclusion. From this perspective, Vinson (2009) notes elements of self-exclusion in some people who appear complacent about being stigmatised. This complacency seems to stem from them having no positive role models, or awareness of the benefits of being socially included. Vinson's (2009) findings are in line the Bourdieuan

(1999) misrecognition notion that disadvantaged people are neither aware of their domination and exclusion, nor of ways to alleviate their plight.

Origins of feelings of social exclusion are often described as emanating from the severing of bonds between individuals and society in general (Buckmaster & Thomas, 2009). Long (2010) suggests that an expectation of individual responsibility is often implied if a person self-excludes and/or fails to comply with societal rules. Nevertheless, the means of facilitating social inclusion is currently assumed dependent on the individual's access to quality resources and equality of workplace participation (Long, 2010). To ensure equality in the workplace, however, mostly requires placing infants and pre-school children in childcare.

Over the last forty years childcare conditions have vastly improved and Theobald et al. (2013) note that ECEC services are becoming more focused on understanding the socially constructed aspects of learning. They explain that government policy has responded to a need for high quality childcare and ECEC services are now expected to cater for children's developmental, identity and socio-cultural needs. ECEC improvements have, therefore, occurred in response to changes in Australian society where women are exercising their right to engage in paid work. The agenda (DEEWR, 2011), for early childhood education and care, states that the provision of quality long day childcare allows parents to participate in the workforce so as to increase productivity and benefit Australia's economy (Wong & Turner, 2014). To ensure parents have equal opportunities to participate in employment, subsidies for childcare and the provision of qualified childcare workers are now recommended.

ECEC focus is on the rights of children in the knowledge that the early years are critical for their relationship success and future participation in society (Theobald et al., 2013). Furthermore, childcare services are also recommended for children who may be living in at-risk familial environments (Watson et al., 2005). Although accepting that parent-child attachments need improving, Aylward and McNeill (2009) are also in favour of parents learning how to utilise childcare services. ECEC approaches, therefore, encompass pre-school programs, which require parental attendance, alongside childcare services, where parents are encouraged to be involved while not being present.

### *1.2.1 Contemporary Early Childhood Focus*

The need to implement inclusive educational practices and focus on the early years, to curb disadvantage, is evident in the growth of CFC services Australia-wide (McDonald, 2011) and LiL, ECEC programs in Tasmania. Currently the social inclusion agenda in Australia

informs the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) guidelines in promoting the social justice benefits of encouraging high participation in early childhood and parenting support programs (Wong & Turner, 2014). This policy is based on the idea that improved childhood literacy and education correlate with adult wellbeing and inclusion in the workplace.

Consequently, the development of *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* guidelines for early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, aims to “extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school” (2009, p. 5). ECEC programs have been set up specifically to provide developmental gains for pre-school children through parenting and community-based programs which offer multiple-interventional support (Watson et al., 2005). A major strategy of EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) guidelines is, therefore, to encourage increased participation in early childhood programs. The *Launching into Learning* Longitudinal Study 2007 – 2014 Progress Report states:

*The goal of LiL is to help children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their educational performance through interventions in early development from birth to before kindergarten. (2010, p. 4)*

LiL, ECEC programs have replaced the previous playgroup type of service which was available to families with young children within the school system. The original service, allowing parents to chat while their children play and explore freely, has now been replaced by a more risk-averse regulatory early childhood service (Theobald et al., 2013). The trend is now towards inclusive educational programs which have more purposeful, outcomes-based goals for children and families. The Tasmanian Department of Education, Early Years website (2012) describes LiL’s commitment to the early childhood years in offering learning opportunities with a focus on family involvement. The commitment to early learning and family participation in LiL programs aligns with the aim to improve early literacy and ensure children are ready for school. The website (2012) explains how these programs are implemented with the knowledge that the early experiences in life are critical to children’s ongoing development and, thus, have an impact on their future wellbeing. LiL services are based on evidence of the success of the UK’s Sure Start project (2004) which emphasises the importance of the role of parents in their children’s social and intellectual development.

CFCs are another early childhood service, which, although not attached to schools, work collaboratively with LiL to provide community-based integrated services to families

with pre-school children. The CFC website (2011) describes the aims, goals and locality of CFCs as:

- A way to increase productivity and reduce welfare costs, by improving health and developmental levels in Australian children.
- A means to ensure community integration, social inclusion and collaboration with LiL services.
- Accessible services located in several low SES areas to encourage at-risk families to participate in community services and social supports and ensure children have appropriate social skills prior to school.

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of the Department of Education, Tasmania website (2012) provides reasons why CFCs are needed. These include:

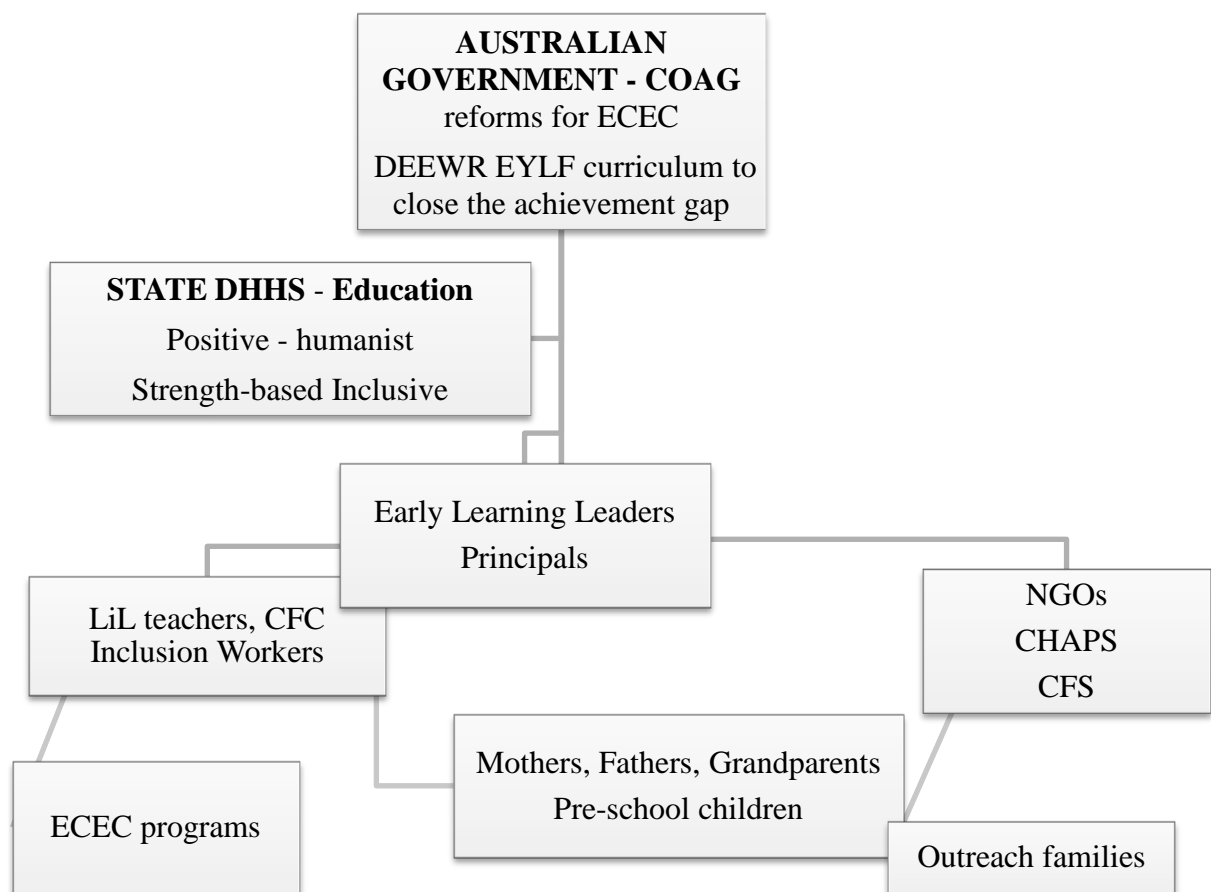
- Changes in socio-economic and family structure in Tasmania and elsewhere.
- Concerns about Tasmanian children's developmental outcomes
- Concerns that many Tasmanian children are suffering serious economic disadvantage, poor health and low school success.
- Knowledge that the early years are the best time to intervene.
- Evidence from UK's Sure Start (2004) programs showing improved social behaviours, independence and self-regulation abilities in families who participate.

According to the Department of Education, Tasmania, website (2011), the uptake of CFCs in Tasmania attests to the perceived need to encourage families with young children to seek support and participate in programs which facilitate social inclusion. The website (2011) states that these programs are designed specifically for families with pre-school children and, by offering easily accessible support to parents in the local community, are dedicated to improving the health, education and care of very young children, especially those in low SES areas.

Also stated on the website (2011) are explanations stating why the national, whole of government policy framework targets the early years. These explanations focus on the goal of providing safer communities by improving education and health for Australia's children.

The following diagram describes the framework, aims and strategies for LiL and CFC programs in Tasmania.

**Figure 1: Early Childhood Program Strategies for LiL and CFCs in Tasmania**



The underlying aim behind early childhood programs is to provide family support strategies that lead to the creation of a fairer society where people have access to personal, social, economic and civic resources in order to live happy, healthy and productive lives (Department of Education Tasmania, website, 2012). The Tasmanian Education website (2012) states that CFC's purpose is to encourage parents to attend and be part of the community; this is in line with the Social Inclusion Strategy, Tasmania (Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009) to increase participation in order to address the barriers to economic, social and civil life. All ECEC educational and childcare programs

operate within the DEEWR (2011) vision, which is to prepare Australian children for learning and life.

Early childhood program strategies can be viewed as a preventative measure with the aim to reduce social exclusion. These measures are based on studies of various programs, such as those conducted by Schweinhart et al. (2005), which show positive results. A longitudinal study of the High/Scope Perry Pre-school program, for example, finds that 40 year old adults who had been involved in these programs, at age three and four years, had higher earning capabilities and lower criminality than those who did not attend (Schweinhart et al., 2005). Vinson's (2009) social research into early education also shows that higher welfare, health and crime costs are associated with low literacy. He notes that the focus on the benefits of educational attainment has resulted in a myriad of early childhood services operating in Australia for the purpose of facilitating social inclusion and improving socio-educational learning in the pre-school years. Vinson (2009) adds that increases in early childhood services, however, have not overcome the issue of the irregular attendance, or non-participation, of those families who most need assistance.

### *1.2.2 Participation Issues*

Despite a focus on social inclusion being applied to policy and practice with the purpose of enhancing economic growth in Australia, "many families are still marginalised and excluded from mainstream opportunities" (Caruana & McDonald, 2011, p. 1). The emphasis is, therefore, on participation to ensure that ECEC programs' aim, to enhance children's and parents' wellbeing, can be achieved. Following a similar approach to LiL and CFC programs, the playgroup model also aims to facilitate social inclusion for Australian families.

A study of the playgroup model, conducted by Jackson (2011), examines how access to the programs can assist in preventing the social isolation known to negatively impact on parental care. Her multi-case study was conducted within an ecological framework in order to reconstruct individual perspectives in supported playgroups. Using a constructivist paradigm, data were gathered from three supported playgroup sessions by interviewing parents and practitioners. The results were based on the ecological idea that childhood outcomes are influenced by multiple factors and relationships. The study concludes that supported playgroups facilitate a social environment which can reduce parents' social isolation. An interesting issue, noted by Jackson (2011) during her playgroup research, was that emotional tension sometimes arose between parents. She found that, if these situations

occurred, it was the practice for these parents to be referred to mediation to assist them with reciprocity and empathy skills. Another interesting scenario was the comments of one of the parents, who stated that her child's behaviour at home was not improving in line with the improved behaviours learned within the playgroup setting. Nevertheless, based on favourable comments from some parents and facilitators, Jackson (2011) concludes that the supported playgroup model works by assisting in the promotion of parents' continued participation.

Studies examining attendance levels in support programs, such as those undertaken by Watson et al. (2005), find that service providers express concern on the low participation and high attrition rates of some parents who seem to perceive the well-intended support as stigmatising. Coyne (2013) suggests that behaviourist-based parenting training-type programs can appear controlling and dehumanising. That is, parents often react in non-rational, emotional ways rather than being swayed by any potential long-term benefits of attending programs. This can be a challenge for practitioners if their own experiences and motivations are contrary to the reality of some of the parent's behaviours. Difficulties also occur, in gaining evidence-based information, because of the many diverse and complex caseloads, Coyne (2013) suggests. Blakemore et al. (2009) find that families in low SES areas are more willing to utilise crisis support, for material needs, than attend health and community service programs which hint of personal development.

Watson and Tully (2008) also express concerns over lack of attendance in their study of an early intervention program, which was aimed at improving childhood attachment outcomes and fostering social inclusion. They conclude that increases in large-scale prevention and early intervention programs have not yet addressed the problem of how to encourage attendance, particularly by those families who most need assistance. Vinson (2009) agrees that the major difficulty, for many families, is irregular or non-participation in early support programs. Despite social inclusion being the goal, Blakemore et al. (2009) note high attrition rates and low levels of attendance of many families who seem inclined to self-exclude.

Qualitative data support the claim that the many families are likely to drop out or decline the offer of support, which, although well-intended, is often perceived as intrusive and possibly threatening (Watson, 2009). The findings of Coyne's (2013) study are that practitioners were aware of a need to change approach, from cognitive behavioural-type parent-child training to an understanding of attachment-based relationship issues. The need



to change thinking is reflected in Watson's (2009) research and she suggests home visiting options can help overcome the major barriers to engagement, especially those related to time management and transport difficulties. The New South Wales Department of Community Services evaluation study on early intervention (Watson et al., 2005) shows that, although home visiting is able to reach the most families, high attrition rates and staff turnovers impinge on the ability to enroll, engage and retain families. At present, a major challenge seems to be that families, who most need assistance, may be missing out on the advantages of attending ECEC support programs. It is important to note, Watson et al. (2005) suggests, that it is usually the families with a degree of self-efficacy, who appear more likely to utilise the benefits offered by these programs. Conversely, parents who are most in need of support appear unmotivated to avail themselves and their children of the means to become more socially included.

### 1.3 DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD THEORIES

To overcome social inclusion issues, multi-purpose programs, such as those based on the UK's Margy Whalley, Pen Green concept, focus on empowering parents to become involved and have a voice (Whalley, 2007). The Margy Whalley idea is that education begins at birth and that families, especially those in need of assistance, should have accessible, respectful and inclusive integrated early childhood services which offer strong community support networks. The Pen Green concept (Whalley, 2007) is a one-stop shop approach to cater for various childhood and family needs; such as childcare, early education, after-school care and parenting education, training and support. These types of integrated services have been implemented in Australia in response to the need for multiple early childhood care and education, health and family supports (Wong et al., 2012).

The integration of early childhood education and care services does, however, create difficulties, because of the differing expertise of practitioners, and decisions on whether to focus mainly on education, health, care and/or welfare (Wong et al., 2012). Similarly, there appears to be one major difference between care and education in early childhood services. That is, while ECEC programs actively encourage parent-child attachments, this type of bonding may be limited if a child attends long day childcare, despite Whalley's (2007) assertion that these services focus on parental involvement.

The notion that very young children can benefit from having several attachment figures aligns with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) which does not focus

exclusively on the primary attachment figure. Ecological systems theory places equal importance on all stages of life; the idea being that any/several attachment figures can serve the very young child's emotional needs. Although conceding that long day childcare is known to contribute to the occurrence of future behavioural problems, Berk (2013) suggests that good quality childcare can become a protective influence, regardless of the risk of later adverse effects. The reason for overlooking the risks associated with long day childcare, according to Berk (2013), is to not discourage mothers from working. She suggests that if mothers want to work but are forced to stay at home, their stress in this situation will be more detrimental to their children's emotional wellbeing. The best scenario, Berk (2013) advises, is to increase quality childcare availability, ensure paid parental employment leave benefits and provide more part-time work opportunities.

Theories on the provision of childcare and pre-school services have moved from a constructivist paradigm, incorporating child-centred developmentalist practices, to a concentration on the socio-cultural context of learning. Theobald et al. (2013) explain that the emphasis on identity, power, culture and gender supports the notion of childhood as being socially constructed. They add that a main focus of ECEC services is to ensure diversity and inclusive practices. In ECEC settings, while children are encouraged to learn through play, there is a purposeful focus on enhancing the child's self-regulation and cognitive awareness (Theobald et al., 2013). Moffitt et al. (2011) suggest that, by promoting early self-control, pre-school education can curb social problems from developing in adulthood; such as poor health and crime outcomes. Consequently, early childhood education is now intentionally promoting self-regulation and self-awareness (Theobald et al., 2013).

Presently, the need to encourage self-regulation and awareness is acknowledged in early childhood services in Australia (Theobald et al., 2013). Bowlby's (1988) theory emphasises that the ability to self-regulate emotions predicts critical thinking and empathy awareness. He adds, however, that these capabilities appear connected and need to develop within the attachment process in the pre-verbal stage of life. Currently, it is well known and accepted that the early years are the time for a child to learn and gain the most beneficial experiences (Theobald et al., 2013). Nevertheless, if the rights of the child are to be upheld, the precise means for them to become successful in negotiating future relationships may need more understanding. What seems to be downplayed is an acknowledgment of the way a secure attachment experience, encompassing the child's proximity to their primary caregiver, becomes a protective factor. This protective feeling seems to be the essential ingredient in

ensuring the child's future social relationships success, because it is during this time, in infancy, that emotional regulation capacities develop (Bowlby, 1988).

Watson et al. (2012) suggest that more understanding is needed of how some children can self-regulate while others cannot. This understanding has been provided by Bowlby (1982) decades ago; that is, a secure attachment experience, in infancy, is necessary to ensure children can develop emotional regulation capabilities. The way this process occurs is that the protective element of a secure attachment is the actual proximity of the primary caregiver, especially in the first two years of life (Bowlby, 1982). The sense of being protected, discussed in chapter 3, is crucial in ensuring emotional regulation abilities, peer relationship success and appropriate social skill abilities. The converse is the development of egocentric coercive and/or passive support strategies, because of the absence of feelings of social security/protection; that is, attachment is solely about proximity and protection strategies, which are related to development of varying degrees of social trust (Bowlby, 1988).

Although critiquing attachment theory, Gaskins (2013) outlines how the concept of socialisation is sometimes mistaken for that of acculturation. Gaskins (2013) explains how anthropologist, Margaret Mead warned against confusing these two concepts; the socialisation process being more complex and difficult to study. Bowlby (1988), however, was able to study the social behaviours/development of many children who were raised in the absence of their primary attachment figure. His studies led him to suggest that attachment ramifications may need to be studied backwards; that is, from the affects (symptoms) back to the person's parenting experiences.

Symptoms, indicating possible ramifications of early childhood social experiences, are evident in high rates of social problems being reported in Tasmania (Social Inclusion report, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2010). Nevertheless, quality childcare is advocated as a way to relieve parents' stress, help them balance work and family and provide favourable attachment experiences for children, so as to enhance their cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing (Berk, 2013).

Supporting the idea of multiple attachments while acknowledging the impact of early family experiences, Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1974) proposes that differing social systems, such as the family, school, structures and cultures all come with sets of rules and norms which interact and impact on the individual. In following ecological theory, changes in cultural norms, which influence social behaviour, can be included when integrating theory, research and practice around the early education aim to improve social

inclusion (Green & Scholes, 2004). Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological theory seems to make it possible to reconcile the importance of economic equality together with the child's early parenting needs; that is, by promoting the expected benefits of childcare.

During the pre-constructivism era, Belsky (1988) expressed concerns about long day childcare options for infants, which he suggests can result in serious mental health risks for them later in life. The contemporary idea, however, is that quality childcare is needed to ensure both parents can participate in the workforce (Wong & Turner, 2014). Consequently, the provision of quality childcare operates alongside a parallel need to facilitate social inclusion; both outcomes are expected to be achieved by encouraging parental involvement in all ECEC services (Whalley, 2007). While acknowledging neurological, epidemiological and longitudinal child studies showing how stress in early childhood is related to poor health and behavioural outcomes, the ECEC focus is placed on improving early childhood measures (Watson et al., 2005). These measures include practices which aim to influence better parent-child behaviours and, ultimately, to reduce the risk of adverse social behaviours developing in children.

### *1.3.1 The Emotional Basis of Social Inclusion*

This thesis proposes that, for early childhood educational programs to be successful in delivering social inclusion, a sound knowledge of the way children learn to become socially inclusive is needed. Currently, the quality and standard of ECEC services is high and, in response to Australia's policy focus on the early years, practitioners' knowledge of early childhood development is comprehensive (Theobald et al., 2013).

Given this knowledge, of the way children's early care impacts on their workforce outcomes and economic success, the ECEC focus is on the rights of the child (Theobald et al., 2013). The recent proliferation of early childhood learning programs indicate acceptance of the need for children to gain enhanced social and literacy skills during early childhood. This acknowledgement underpins Australia's social policy, which is based on evidence correlating improved childhood literacy/education with adult wellbeing and inclusion in the workplace (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009).

Perspectives differ, however, as to the most beneficial ways to ensure early childhood education/care can deliver real benefits in education/employment opportunities and social inclusion outcomes. Watson et al. (2012) suggest that the purpose of education is to ensure that children flourish. To fully understand the idea of social inclusion, as a means of

flourishing, this thesis aims to enhance understanding of the meaning behind certain perspectives on social behaviour. Kennedy and Kennedy (2004), for example, suggest that there is a need for more understanding of attachment implications. They argue that importance needs to be placed on ensuring teachers have a good understanding of the way a child's internal working model (IWM) relates to their attachment experience, because a failure to do so creates a risk of further perpetuating the child's social problems.

Riley (2011) also emphasises the importance for both practitioners and teachers to have an extensive knowledge of attachment style implications. He advises that this knowledge can help practitioners to avoid misinterpreting student, parent and child behaviours and reduce the harm elicited by any misguided responses and unhelpful reactions. Misunderstandings can be exacerbated by focussing on cognitive instructional learning and omitting the emotional influences on social behaviour, according to Riley (2011). He adds that a concentration on cognitions and instructions can often omit understandings of the emotional foundation of empathy and social behaviour. It is important, therefore, to understand how a person learns to behave socially, because a concentration on cognitions, rather than emotions, may impede knowledge of how this actually occurs.

### *1.3.2 Focus on Cognition*

If the educational approach focuses too much on the cognitive tradition (Johansson (2006), it may omit understanding of the influences of unseen others (Spodek & Saracho, 2006). Unseen others are in the form of multiple mirror neurons (Goleman, 2007); that is, cognitive intelligence is not on the same sphere, because social intelligence is contingent on responses and expectations relating to emotional affect. Psychometrics may be helpful in assessing and measuring cognitive abilities, but psychology's reliance on science means there is no differentiation made between cognitive and social skills, of which the latter includes non-verbal issues (Goleman, 2007).

The concept of emotions, therefore, needs to be studied in terms of a person's response to social experiences and not as an internal private state, as the psychological tradition advocates (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Social constructionists do not subscribe to the idea of universal body language, despite emotional expressions being across-cultural, adaptive problem-solving responses to survival; that is, primarily concerned with identity, temporality, hierarchy and territoriality (TenHouten, 2007). The challenge, in the education

context, is to discern between the science of psychology and the art of teaching; the latter ultimately being merely a means to organise acquired habits and behaviours (Hilgard, 1996).

In examining educational approaches, Ertmer and Newby (1993) explain that both behaviourism and cognitivism are primarily objective and allude to operant conditioning. A focus on cognitions, therefore, tends to favour behaviourism; that is, that learning occurs by repetition. By contrast, a person's emotions can be the primary motivator of behaviour, being instigated by associational triggers (classical conditioning). An emphasis on subjective emotionally-based, classically conditioned responses, as the prime motivator of social behaviour, therefore, relegates habit-formed and imitative (operant) behaviours as secondary to the initial emotional trigger governing social learning (Ertmer & Newby, 1993).

In ideal conditions, emotions and cognitions are interactively involved in goal-directed problem-solving behaviour, which TenHouten (2007) explains, involves logical, analytical rational thought. Emotions, such as fear, however, can impinge on a person's decision-making, causing rationality to fail and rendering them incapable of adjusting to new situations or information. TenHouten (2007) suggests that a fearful situation often leads to a person displaying socially irrational behaviours. It is, therefore, suggested that, to understand why people behave in seemingly irrational ways requires delving into attachment theory. As Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) explain, attachment theory provides explanations of subtle behavioural meanings, observable in children's, parents', and teachers' social interactions.

Attachment theory shows how early socio-emotional relationships impact on the child's cognitive-affective view of the self and others (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). For this reason, Denham (2006) suggests that early childhood practitioners need to become good emotional coaches, able to engage in conversations about feelings and help children regulate their emotions.

There are different ways of thinking about early childhood education/care and social inclusion. The major differences are evident in two perspectives; the ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) idea that multiple attachments are of equal importance over the lifespan, and attachment theory, stating that the primary attachment experience is foundational to adult emotional and social wellbeing (Bowlby, 1988).

Another difference of ideas is between the cognitive focus, which assumes the rational logical process of the mind (Holmes, 1993) and the more complex notion, that emotionally-driven triggers motivate social behaviours (Bowlby, 1988; TenHouten, 2007). Silver (2010) adds that different ways of thinking can be rational in terms of adherence to

certain values. These values can determine one's political persuasion in favouring either conservative (Liberal) or progressive (Labor) values, in Australia. For instance, Duschinsky et al. (2015) suppose that attachment theory supports a conservative ideology by adhering to the dictates of nature and focusing on the child's, rather than the caregiver's needs. Social inclusion principles are seen as values to be pursued in democratic societies where equality, justice and fairness are promoted (Wong & Turner, 2014). The point of difference, highlighted in this thesis, is that an emphasis on the influence of strongly-held values and rational choice, in the pursuit of long-term economic goals, can downplay the force of habitual behaviours relating to emotional affect. It is argued that all motivators of social behaviours may need to be acknowledged when implementing ECEC approaches, if the aim is to reduce disadvantage by facilitating societal inclusion. This thesis, therefore, draws attention to the socio-emotional aspects of inclusion/exclusion.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has briefly reviewed historical factors of parenting, especially practices involving the separation of children from their parents and familial environment. It is from this background that the contemporary situation of an integrated ECEC approach to early childhood services has emerged in Australia. Chapter 1 has introduced LiL and CFC programs currently operating in Tasmania, and which form the context for the subject of this research study. In Tasmania, these programs have been implemented to improve social inclusion trends by enhancing socio-economic and emotional wellbeing for pre-school children and their families. The concept of social inclusion has also been discussed, including whether choice is implicit in motivations to participate in programs or more likely influenced by emotional triggers. This research differs from mainstream early childhood literature in considering social exclusion in terms of the attachment-based construction of emotional regulation and social dispositions/inclinations.

The following chapter explores the literature around social inclusion/exclusion with a focus on Bourdieuan theory on social dispositions. The issue of emotional influences, as drivers of social behaviours, is also discussed as implicit in feelings of social inclusion/exclusion.

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

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The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature around the concept of social inclusion with particular emphasis on the Bourdieuan notion of social dispositions. This review seeks an in-depth examination of the concept of social inclusion, which is a policy goal framing ECEC program aims to reduce disadvantage and enhance societal wellbeing. Watson et al. (2012) wonder if it is possible to teach happiness and whether educational programs should be expected to deal with children's socio-emotional development. They note that the purpose of education, in democratic countries, is to provide children with the skills to flourish in their adult life. The idea of flourishing is described as a sense of being in a state of wellbeing; that is being happy, confident and autonomous, as well as feeling in control, resilient and involved. A sense of wellbeing is explained as having good social relationships, devoid of disruptive or aggressive inclinations. Watson et al. (2012) suggest that a person's sense of wellbeing equates with their inclusion which can be facilitated by humanistic and anti-discriminatory educational environments. Values of respect and fairness are, therefore, expected to be upheld in ECEC programs (Silver, 2010).

This thinking supports the notion that inclusive practices, in education, are a way to engender children with a sense of belonging and feeling socially included (Theobald et al., 2013). These issues interested the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and this chapter will explain his theories around social inequality and the sociology of education. It will start by considering the juxtaposition between economic and emotional wellbeing as an issue in examining the complexity of social exclusion and alienation.

### 2.1 THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The need to enhance social inclusion is examined in this thesis in the context of changing cultural values over time, in Australia. The issue of parenting alongside the contemporary ECEC approach, which relies on child and family services as a means to strengthen declining rates of social inclusion, is also examined. This examination will include a focus on the influence of emotional factors as drivers of social inclinations.

The concept of social inclusion is complex and Moore (2007) notes cultural changes towards egalitarianism and welfare reform, along with and economic prosperity, in contemporary Australia. Of note, however, is that these changes have not addressed



increasing psychosocial disorders, challenging child/student behaviours and consequent adult wellbeing difficulties. Emotional factors are also implicit in findings, such as those reported by the Australian Telethon Institute (Lawrence et al., 2015). This report finds that anxiety and depressive disorders are rising in Australian children. Similarly, the AEDC (2016) survey of five year old Australian children shows that emotional problems are increasing. Bowlby (1988) states that the high rate of psychosocial disorders in wealthy societies are related, predominantly, to early childhood rather than economic issues. Wilkinson (2005) also notes that rapid increases in wealth since the 1970s, in Australia, have not brought about increases in general psychosocial wellbeing. Moore (2007) reiterates, stating that welfare reforms and higher standards of living over the last few decades, in Australia, have not remedied psychosocial challenges for many families. These psychosocial trends suggest that to achieve societal wellbeing and inclusion may require more nuanced understandings of the meaning of being socially included, for individuals and societies.

In seeking to explain psychosocial patterns, Bowlby (1988) warns of the dangers of adhering to popular but misguided trends. He claims that unhelpful ideas, especially those that prioritise the pursuit of affluence, can redirect the focus towards economic indices rather than ensuring the production of healthy, resilient children. Moreover, the ramifications of a failure to ensure children experience the optimum attachment experience are dire, because of the high risk of them developing disagreeable behaviours, emotional disturbances and personality disorders. He explains that behavioural problems and disturbances, developing during childhood, can manifest in future family dysfunction and/or violence, because of the effects of unresolved anxieties, anger and guilt.

More concerning are the generational social inclusion problems which follow, because inappropriate parenting practices are transmitted through successive families. Bowlby (1988) is, therefore, adamant that successful parenting is the key to the mental health needed for a person's social wellbeing. He stresses that it takes a huge amount of time and effort to produce healthy resilient children and for this reason, those parents who have themselves experienced unhappy childhoods will struggle to cope. The Bowlbian message is that the society in which we live is merely a product of our past and a reflection of the care afforded to children over recent times.

With this in mind, Green and Scholes (2004) suggest that policy makers need more understanding of the generational effects of imposing non-helpful values and practices which have the effect of shaping parenting practices. They assert that community and institutional

leaders may need more understanding of the conditions of secure attachment, in order to influence, reward and support better parenting practices, especially for the disadvantaged. Without this knowledge, culturally-influenced social policy may be creating the very social problems that early childhood services are endeavouring to ameliorate (Green & Scholes, 2004). This thesis, therefore, highlights that an obstacle to social inclusion is perhaps a culture which prioritises work life over family commitments and neighbourly supports (Moore, 2007). Currently, in Australia, emerging social problems are being addressed by encouraging families to participate in ECEC programs, which aim to improve children's educational and future work prospects (Social Inclusion Principles for Australia, Australian Government, 2010). But while culturally-driven social policies are striving to promote equality in the workforce, there is a simultaneous need for early childhood and parenting supports to address worsening psychosocial outcomes (Moore, 2007).

### *2.1.1 Social Alienation*

Allman (2013) delves further in his explanation of the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion. He asserts that ideas of social inclusion and exclusion have existed throughout history and, although interpreted in various ways, generally refer to being in, or on the outside of, the main social group. Contemporary sociological explanations now cite inequality, integration and stratification of people on the periphery of society. Ultimately, however, social inclusion/exclusion refers to feelings of being welcome and included in mainstream society as opposed to being ignored and ostracised.

It is extremely important, Allman (2013) states, for people to feel a sense of belonging and attachment, because segregation denotes being unfavoured and, as a consequence, being separated from the favoured groups. He explains how social exclusion, throughout history, literally meant being rejected from the group. For instance, physical and psychological ostracism and discrimination have been used as a means to separate those perceived to be “unclean” from the “healthy”. Those designated as “untouchables”, through the caste systems in India, were thus forced to become dependent and at a high risk of exploitation. The fear of being excluded has always been the ultimate punishment, as was demonstrated by the Ostracism Law, used as a means to banish opposing leaders and tyrants in ancient Greece.

The benefits of being socially included are very high, because of the evolutionary origins relating to the need to avoid the pain of separation and exclusion (Allman, 2013).

Overall, the fundamental reason for individuals to remain in cohesive social groups is to enhance their survival chances.

### *2.1.2 New Ideas on Social Inclusion*

While the notion of social inclusion/exclusion has always existed, Allman (2013) notes that a change in thinking emerged in 18<sup>th</sup> century France and spread throughout western societies. Following the Enlightenment era, the importance of autonomy and solidarity of minority, marginalised groups became popular. The idea of collectivism, thus, became rejected as a threat to individual liberty. Instead, a new philosophy of solidarism emerged heralding a new liberalism, welfarism and democracy and from where the notion of stigmatisation arose (Allman, 2013).

Consequently, this new concept of stigma came to relate to the social exclusion of certain groups, perceived to be blamed, devalued, feared and/or rejected. These new ideas led to the notion that power and domination processes are capable of preventing certain people from participating in economic, social, political and cultural life. Exclusion, based on stigma, usually involves consensus around the moral condemnation of certain groups (Hogg et al., 2005). For this reason, Allman (2013) suggests the discipline of sociology can be helpful to identify and explain these social divisions and provide links with the concept of social inclusion.

It is notable that, although the value of individual autonomy is now prioritised, the term “social exclusion” has come to denote a problem of isolated individuals, especially disaffected youth in societies where social cohesion is a goal (Hayes et al., 2008). For instance, in Australia, the need to maintain social cohesion is implicit in the notion that disadvantage can be reduced by fostering inclusive environments and communities. This idea has been well received by government departments and support services who eagerly promote the merits of improving rates of social inclusion, Dunlevy (2012) states. She contemplates, however, whether the term “social inclusion” is perhaps just a pleasant-sounding cover for another layer of bureaucracy within which the Social Inclusion Board aimlessly ponders its meaning. Dunlevy (2012) writes that, although culturally-influenced social inclusion strategies aim to reduce disadvantage, there is a risk that programs are merely ensuring work for the service sector while increasing bureaucratic power over the disadvantaged and thus perpetuating their social exclusion. The meaning of social inclusion can be vague and varied across social contexts and, as a result, become purely ideological and

shallow rhetoric (Silver, 2010). For this reason, Bourdieu's (1984) *habitus* theory is considered helpful in explaining how social dispositions impact on, and are affected by, societal forces.

### 2.1.3 Social Dispositions

Bourdieu's (1984) *habitus* theory illustrates how a person's social dispositions have a pervasive influence on their social inclinations. As Nash (1999) explains, the theory of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984) illustrates how a person's social dispositions are reproduced inter-generationally and, when compatible with the socialisation practices expected within the wider society, can enable a seamless integration into community and education settings. Yet, if a person's dispositions are incompatible, they will feel alienated rather than able to absorb the mainstream culture, such as in educational programs. This process occurs, as Bourdieu (1984) explains, because one's acquired social dispositions influence practices and responses to the structures of society and these patterns of behaviour, delegating social hierarchies, are unconsciously reproduced through the generations.

Bourdieu (1984) further claims that disadvantaged people are unaware of their subjection and exclusion, because they are already suffering exclusion and domination. This misrecognition notion is, however, critiqued by Rancière (2007) and Ross (1991). Similarly, Nash (2002) suggests that the limits of Bourdieuan theory are demonstrated by his proposal that the dominant class reproduce their culture within the educational environments, and entrench the exclusion of the lower class by perceiving them as inferior. Nash (2002) has concerns with critical realist theory, because of its suggestion that patterns of behaviour emanate from early cultivated social rules. He argues against Bourdieu's (1984) suggestion that cultural habits become embodied and suggests that this idea discounts the theory of social action, eliminates the idea of choice and hints of determinism.

The notion that one's social dispositions/habits become embodied, but operate below the level of consciousness is, however, clearly defined as one of the motivating influences of social action. Habituation (Weber, 1919/1956/1968) is described as behaviour, which upon being repeated over time becomes entrenched and customary. As Bourdieu (1984) reports, social dispositions are formed in the initial early childhood experience and become the embodied *modus operandi* in responses and reactions to societal interactions and influences. Nevertheless, taking the rational actor stance, Nash (2002) repudiates the idea that social agents have little insight into the reasons for their particular behavioural patterns. On the

contrary, Bourdieu (1990a) explains that people's personal accounts can be misleading, specifically because they are generally unaware of the real causes of their struggles.

While not conceding to rational choice theory, Nash (2002) believes that people do have insight and are able to express themselves but that these skills are learned rather than embodied. The belief that children do actively engage in decision-making leads Nash (2002) to suggest that teachers and practitioners can play a role in helping to re-shape their socio-educational habits and behaviours. He suggests that the way to improve educational attainment rates is by early cognitive socialisation, which he believes is more important than social capital. Whalley (2007) also believes that children are already decision-makers, able to plan and experiment. For this reason, she suggests that practitioners need to encourage self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-regulation in children and encourage parents' active involvement.

By contrast, Bourdieu (1984) argues that disadvantage relates mostly to a person's social skills. He explains that discrimination and disadvantage are elicited if a person does not have the skills to negotiate relationships in the appropriate culturally-prescribed fashion. In contrast, the rational actor idea supposes that everyone is capable of being socially included through cognitive socialisation, as Nash (2002) assumes. Similarly, social inclusion approaches in Australia seem to subscribe to the idea that being socially included is a choice and a skill that can be learned by means of educational programs.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2009) study of education, training and social inclusion also states that improved educational opportunities are integral to combat social exclusion. Their study describes social inclusion as being linked to opportunities, resources and human capability *but* with the implied understanding that people have a choice to participate.

The assumption of free choice underpins the emphasis on education as a way to facilitate social inclusion by providing the learning and the life-skills necessary for children to participate in life and protect against their exclusion (ABS, 2009). Barriers to social inclusion, cited in the study, are mental conditions, nervousness, physical disabilities and poor language skills. Subsequently, the bases of wellbeing are described as quality social relationships, a high standard of education and meaningful work. The assumption is that everyone *should* have access to the resources and relationships to make life healthy, happy and productive and that the provision of resources can help facilitate their social inclusion.

### *2.1.4 Education for Social Inclusion*

The term “social inclusion” is widely used to provide a framework so that support services, welfare and educational institutions can work towards reducing disadvantage by providing equality of access to opportunities and participation (ABS, 2009). The reason given, as to why social inclusion is now on the policy agenda, is that previous strategies to generate wealth and wellbeing have not brought success for everyone, particularly those experiencing entrenched social exclusion. The Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania report (Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009), for example, reveals that high levels of poverty in Tasmania coincide with community concerns around loss of respect by young people and loss of community spirit. The report cites high rates of disadvantage, especially in Tasmania, and advocates improving social cohesion as a positive move towards ensuring harmonious communities and reducing disadvantage.

Focusing on the economic pathway to social inclusion, a priority of Australia’s Social Inclusion Agenda (Australian Government, 2010) is to ensure economic equality by reducing discrimination and promoting social cohesion. Overall, the principles of the Social Inclusion Board in Australia (Australian Government, 2010) are to aspire to reduce disadvantage, increase social, civil and economic participation and to give people a greater voice and responsibility. To achieve these goals, the aim is to build on individual and community strengths, partnership and stakeholders and to tailor services with high priority given to early intervention/prevention, joined-up services and whole of government solutions. This approach relies on evidence and integrated data to inform policy, locational approaches and planning for sustainability. The notion of social inclusion, as an important social issue, has become embedded in most social institutions, including educational programs. Watson, for instance, points out that “reform of our school education systems is critical to achieving a more socially inclusive society” (2009, p. 2). The term “social inclusion” is featured on the national policy agenda and Australian educational institutions are required to work towards this goal by maximising the educational achievements of the most disadvantaged children, from low SES areas, with the aim to close the achievement gap (Watson, 2009).

In other countries, such as the UK, Ainscow et al. (2006) explain how the promotion of inclusion in education is both descriptive and prescriptive and includes issues of discipline as well as attending to groups, perceived as vulnerable to exclusion and discrimination. The action part of inclusion is described as participation and responding to diversity, whereas the values part relates to reducing bullying and building respectful relationships with parental

involvement. The perception of social inclusion as a learned skill means that participating in programs is crucial to ensure information on the values of social inclusion can be communicated and understood (Ainscow et al., 2006). There remains, however, a lack of agreement as to whether social inclusion is a state of being or a process of becoming; the latter suggesting that social inclusion can be taught (Watson et al., 2012).

Bourdieu (1984) advises that a more in-depth understanding of social behaviours can be sought by acknowledging the subjective lived experience in relation to objective, observable social action. The sociological perspective, described by Bourdieu (1984), provides understanding of habitually motivated behaviours, which determine a person's social dispositional response/reaction to societal structures and possibly affect their participation in community and educational services. From an individual perspective, Bowlby's (1973) internal working model (IWM) idea suggests that social dispositions are acquired from early attachment experience which frames the way a person interprets, relates and responds to social encounters. Bourdieu's (1984) macro perspective examines the way people's social dispositions impact on their experiences within the dominant culture and structural forces of society. Complementarily, from an individual micro perspective and based on clinical observations, Bowlby's attachment theory (1973) explains the way habitual social behaviours develop within the early attachment experience, from where the IWM of the self develops.

Notwithstanding the aspirations of socially inclusive approaches, in education and welfare services, feelings of social alienation may not be easily ameliorated if a person has developed certain coping strategies, Green and Scholes (2004) explain. Those with disorganised attachment styles, for instance, use strategies such as minimisation, denial and/or aggression as a way to maintain their "inner self". People who experience deep alienation are, therefore, highly vulnerable to self-harming and/or harming others. Although it may seem plausible for teachers/practitioners to enhance children's social and emotional wellbeing, as Watson et al. (2012) expect, the reciprocal nature of social interactions means that teachers' attachment-based responses can also affect students' reactions and *vice versa* (Riley, 2011). Similarly, differing social interactions/circumstances produce varied responses.

As Watson et al. (2012) envisage, it may not be a simple linear progression from educational competence to employment success and then to ultimate psychosocial wellbeing and flourishing. The idea of a progression to psychosocial flourishing draws on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs idea, which illustrates a pyramid of personal growth from basic survival

needs to the highest level of self-actualisation (Caruana & McDonald, 2011). Bowlby (1969/1982) suggests that an inverse pyramid analogy may be more pertinent, because of the primacy (basic need) of early secure bonding, having a major effect on future psychosocial success. Furthermore, a sense of secure bonding, felt during the non-verbal stage of life, is paramount in formulating the processes needed to satisfy the universal human need for “lasting psychological connectedness” (Bowlby, 1969, p.194).

To re-ignite feelings of connectedness and belonging, the Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania report (Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009) promotes individual access to services and community integration to facilitate social inclusion needs. This report reveals that social exclusion remains a problem in Tasmania where high numbers of the population are described as being at risk of social isolation. Consequently, a solution is sought through access to community social inclusion services which aim to promote societal connectedness and individual feelings of belonging.

An understanding of the way social learning occurs has implications for social inclusion facilitation in early childhood and other educational approaches. For instance, it needs to be understood that, although methodical, instructional learning can be lasting and deep, the effects of very early social learning are the most durable (Bourdieu, 1984).

In order to make sense of an infinite diversity of social practices, Bourdieu (1984) suggests a need to move away from the linear thinking of cultural ideologies. He notes that post-industrial societies find it difficult to reconcile how ideals of equal opportunities have not led to a removal of class distinction and the reproduction of disadvantage.

## 2.2 CULTURAL REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

### 2.2.1 *Critique of Bourdieu's Theory*

The idea of a cultural reproduction of privilege or disadvantage as an overarching grand theory, is often met with resistance. For instance, Sullivan (2002) concedes that the notion of cultural capital may be useful, but suggests that it needs re-defining. Sullivan (2002) views the Bourdieuan idea of cultural arbitrariness as vague for proposing that lower class people are not respected for their hard work merely because they lack the “upper class style”. While she concedes that this idea may be plausible, she cannot accept that inequalities can occur within the education system if all children are subjected to the same examinations under strict criteria. Sullivan (2002) strongly argues against the concept of *habitus*, stating that it is confusing and of no use to empirical study. The Bourdieuan idea, that people unwarily



estimate their likelihood of success or failure, seems implausible to Sullivan (2002), who does not believe that an unconscious estimation can be generated by a conscious individual.

Sullivan's (2002) comments exemplify the difficulties many people have in understanding why it is not a simple exercise to change one's inclination, even upon recognising self-imposed negative assessments. Bourdieu's (1990a) idea, that lower class students estimate their likelihood of success based on objective probabilities, is critiqued as deterministic by Sullivan (2002), who states that it omits individual agency and consciousness. She appears unable to grasp Bourdieu's (1990a) explanation of the way certain cultivated dispositions produce differing behaviours, depending on specific situations and circumstances. Bourdieu (1990a) explains that, because the social world is complex, some social phenomena may appear vague and obscure, but this does not lessen their importance and need to be examined.

In disagreeing with this summation, Sullivan (2002) claims that Bourdieu's theories are purposely obscure in order for him to avoid repudiation and she, therefore, rejects his suggestion that critics simply fail to understand his ideas. The basis of Sullivan's (2002) criticism of Bourdieu is that he seems to oppose scientific values while at the same time claiming a commitment to science. Interestingly, she argues that, in order for Bourdieu to be able to validate his theories, he needs to prove that children inherit their parents' cultural capital. Again, this comment shows a misunderstanding of Bourdieu's (1984) theory, which simply proposes that social dispositions develop from childhood experiences and historical circumstances; it is these specific dispositions which shape the way people respond and behave in certain social situations. Bourdieu's (1984) theory, therefore, does not need to prove that dispositions are genetically inherited *per se*.

Nevertheless, in an attempt to empirically assess cultural capital, Sullivan (2002) arbitrarily chooses variables, such as reading and/or taste for beaux arts. Her study is based on a correlation, empirically found to exist between literacy skills and academic success but, as Vinson (2009) suggests, this correlation cannot account for at least one important variable; the influence of emotional issues. Bourdieu (1990a, 1999) suggests that empiricists hijack opinion and predispose common sense rational beliefs, while claiming epistemological innocence. Overall, it appears that empirical methods face difficulties in measuring intangible concepts, such as cultural capital, as Dumais' (2006) research of pre-school children demonstrates. The challenge Dumais (2006) experiences is in the conceptualisation

of cultural capital and consequent need to base *habitus* variables on parent and teacher perceptions.

Another study, by Tzanakis (2011), finds difficulties in gaining quantitative evidence to confirm Bourdieu's hypothesis, that inequality is reproduced in the education system. To overcome this hurdle, Tzanakis (2011) concludes that the cultural capital theory needs to include social network capital. Further misrepresentations of *habitus* theory are evident in Reay's (2004) suggestion that, by employing qualitative and quantitative methods, education research can use *habitus* theory as both a collective and individual concept; that is, referring to both individual and group dispositions. Her claim, that the concept of *habitus* can be used to describe group and also individual dispositions, is concerning to Atkinson (2011) who notes the difficulties researchers encounter in attempting to use Bourdieuan theory in educational research. McDonough (1997), for instance, claims that schools have four "habiti" and Reay (1998) perceives *habitus* as meaning the way the school culture shapes students' perceptions of their available choices. Reay (1998) uses the plural, "habitus", to describe how the education culture impacts on students and their parents' practices and choices (Atkinson, 2011).

The concept of *habitus*, however, is not meant to be an anthropomorphisation of non-living things, such as institutions, because it refers to a person's acquired characteristics, which are individually-acquired traits, schemes of perception and capacities (Atkinson, 2011). The point is that these traits are specific to the individual, even though certain groups/families may appear to have similar worldviews and practices. For this reason, various subtle differences in the individual's social/cultural capital and social expectations/reactions mean that generalisations cannot be made simply in terms of one's familial or social grouping (Atkinson, 2011).

Nash (1990) agrees that not all members of the one family necessarily have the same experiences, but suggests that this further discounts the familial cultural capital idea. He argues that the flaw in Bourdieu's theory, of familial capital, is that members of the same family often experience varying degrees of academic and social success and, consequently these occurrences actually disprove Bourdieu's theory. Bourdieu does not deny that people in the same familial culture can experience divergent trajectories but, as a sociologist and not a psychologist, he is not in a position to analyse individual differences (Nash, 1990).

For this reason, Bowlby's (1988) clinically-based attachment theory is used, in this thesis, to offer an explanation of individual aspects of social behaviour. Bowlby's (1988)

theory can show how individual differences can occur, because early attachment experiences can differ between siblings in the same family. Each child's specific early social experiences can affect their relationship success and social inclusion in differing ways according to their early care experiences.

Many researchers appear prejudiced towards Bourdieuan theory, mainly because they seem unable to understand how culturally defined practices can produce discrimination (Savage & Bennett, 2005). These misunderstandings occur with researchers who appear more inclined towards economic accounts of inequality. Nash (1990), for example, claims that a "universal pedagogy" aimed at eliminating discrimination by the dominant class, is unrealistic, because economic divisions create advantage to the middle classes. As Savage and Bennett (2005) suggest, many sociologists seem to accept the economic inequality explanation of poverty over the cultural/social capital one. Sullivan (2002) and Reay's (2004) critique of *habitus* theory is that it is primarily unable to account for individual agency, consciousness and choice. Reay (2004) adds that there is a degree of choice implicit in the concept of *habitus* but Bourdieu (1990a) argues that embodied cultural rules can make the concept of choice and social action confusing.

As Social Action theory (Weber, 1919/1956/1968) explains, not all behaviour is motivated by a choice to achieve an economic or even socially viable goal. For instance, "value rational" motivation refers to social action driven by ethical principles related to certain culturally-based behaviours or adherence to religious beliefs and norms, which may not always be economically/socially rational. Affectual behaviour, resembling Pavlovian classical conditioning, is motivated by some stimuli or emotion and triggered by association. In line with operant conditioning, habitual/traditional motivation, rather than influenced by future instrumental goals, is acquired through repetition where behaviours become entrenched over time. The different ways, in which social behaviour can be influenced and motivated, mean that analysing the meaning of social actions may be a difficult task (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Nevertheless, Bourdieu (1990a) considers that sociological study needs to be complicated, because to try and simplify it can be dangerous. The complexity of social behaviours is highlighted in the way in which self-worth beliefs are elicited and how these self-worth beliefs are reflected in responses from other people, such as peers and teachers. The way in which a person's self-worth beliefs are reflected in responses to, and from, others is subtle and not easily revealed in self-report accounts.

### 2.2.2 Bourdieu and Emotions

Bourdieu (1990b) does not see the merit in socio-psychological interpretations of subjective representations based solely on peoples' feed-back, because these do not account for "symbolic violence", as the main perpetrator of disadvantage. Symbolic violence occurs by means of the disapproving looks and gestures, unconsciously embedded in modes of action, gait, dress and accent of the privileged, whose dispositions serve to impose their legitimacy and ensure their success in both education and the wider community. Omitting the impact of body language can lead to an assumption that social inclusion can be taught, whereas body language, although often subtle, is arguably a more powerful influence and virtually impossible to teach or measure. So, without paying heed to the way body language processes operate, teachers and practitioners may, inadvertently, further entrench social and/or economic disadvantage by means of their positive or negative body-language responses. Bourdieu (1990a) explains that feelings of distinction are embodied. This mean that, if a person finds a need strive for an inner sense of entitlement, they do not really "have what it takes". Body language is, therefore, the language of emotions as it relates to self-concept.

## 2.3 SOCIAL LEARNING

### 2.3.1 *The Image of the Self*

This image of self is described by Bourdieu (1984) as the cultivation of *habitus*, which engenders differences of acquired competencies and the manner of behaving, relating to the different conditions which have been experienced. Bourdieu (1984) explains how early learning is imperceptibly played out within the family, beginning in infancy and continuing into school life and the wider community. This type of social learning differs from scholastic methodical learning, particularly in the durability of its effects. In other words, although the child can be taught social skills, their early learned cultivation of reciprocal social dispositions pervades all other learning. Bourdieu (1984) points out that social learning is not linear, because different conditions of existence produce diverse behavioural responses and practices and these become the person's way of being. This way of being, *habitus*, develops from necessary behaviours, developed in response to experiences and which become social dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984). These dispositions are then perceived, interpreted and evaluated by others, according to their own social learning schemes (Bourdieu, 1990b).

Cultural capital and inequalities are, therefore, not primarily about wealth but more about early acquired cultural resources, which cannot be explained by rational choice logic (Bourdieu, 1990b). Bourdieu (1984) explains how different conditions of existence produce different *habitus*. People's social dispositions are identified, interpreted and/or perceived by others, depending on how the other person identifies with that behaviour, based on their own dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984). The development of socially agreeable skills, meaning the type of social behaviours that can be easily interpreted by others, is crucial to social adaptation and inclusion in certain settings. Being able to engage with others and learn, however, requires an early-childhood-acquired ability to control behaviours and emotions (Denham, 2006). Consequently, Bourdieu (1990a) suggests a need to move away from the humanist, existentialist<sup>4</sup> focus, because it leads rational actor theorists to draw on anthropological fictions to explain irrational conduct and weakness of will. That is, in attempting to solve the problem of irrational behaviour, rational actor theorists find a need to produce an ideal example of how a reasonable person *ought* to be (Bourdieu, 1990a).

### 2.3.2 Rational Choice

Presumptions of rational choice seem to underpin the Australian Social Inclusion principles (Australian Government, 2010) which state that an understanding of choice is implicit in decisions to participate in support services. The cultural expectation that social, educational and economic wellbeing is simply a matter of choice can lead to an assumption that easy access to opportunities and community engagement is all that is needed (Green & Scholes, 2004). This "rational choice thinking" derives from capitalist cultural values of competence and competition, which promote hyper-individualism and hyper-rationality. In western cultural and institutional life, the assumption that people can act rationally by calculating means and ends, supports the idea that reason and emotion are separate entities (Green & Scholes, 2004). By contrast, rational social behaviour, according to TenHouten (2007), involves an emotional commitment and the integration of both emotions and cognitions towards goal-directed problem-solving functions. He states that the idea of rationality is a modern Enlightenment idea, which infers that people are able to act intentionally and think in coherent, organised and logical ways, so as to make decisions and plan a course of action.

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<sup>2</sup>The humanist existentialist focus idea relates to Maslow's self-actualisation theory and promotes interest in increasing self-awareness in the here and now and focussing on the person not the symptom

Conversely, the pre-Enlightenment, Cartesian notion is that emotions belong to the body but the mind is moral and reasoning and needs to subvert bodily passions/emotions.

The thesis supports Bourdieu's (1990a) suggestion that rational actor thinking is a post-Enlightenment idea, which does not account for emotionally-based social influences. Although rational choice denotes an ability to choose and plan towards long term goals, it is not the only motivational force influencing behaviour. Weberian social action theory (1919/1956/1968) brings understanding of the ways in which social behaviour can be influenced in varying degrees and combinations, by rational/instrumental, value-laden, emotionally-based and/or habitual behaviours. With regard to the latter, social dispositions become customary behaviours, dictating the way people respond socially and the extent to which they are motivated by economically rational ends, ethical beliefs and/or emotional triggers. Although the child's representations of the world are interconnected with their literacy abilities, these representations are more related to the emotional issue of survival than cognitive decision-making (Sroufe et al., 1999). What is sometimes forgotten, Bourdieu suggests, is that:

*these cognitive instruments fulfill... functions that are not purely cognitive...produced by successive generations, in particular conditions, schemes of perception, appreciation and action, acquired through practice...as Weber puts it; being entirely dominated by the concern to ensure the success of production and reproduction, in a word, survival, they are oriented towards the most dramatically practical, vital and urgent ends.* (1990b, p. 94-95)

Bourdieu's (1984) notion of *habitus* explains how "ways of behaving" evolve and create inequalities if certain socially-acceptable mannerisms/responses have not been acquired. Emotionally-based feelings of social inclusion or exclusion have been ascribed various interpretations throughout history (Allman, 2013). For this reason, a general theory of emotions requires a multi-disciplinary approach. TenHouten, (2007) adds that the study of emotions needs to include the body, mind and society so as to examine evolutionary biological, mental psychological and cultural sociological issues culminating in a neuro-cognitive sociological view.

To illustrate the diverse ideas on social inclusion/exclusion, emotions and social learning, the summaries which follow show how various disciplines explain these concepts. These summaries indicate how specific approaches perceive aspects of social inclusion in

terms of the source, definition and ways to ameliorate social exclusion. The brief description provides a background for comparing some of the varied ways of perceiving social and non-social behaviours across disciplines. This outline also illustrates different ways of understanding and reasons put forward as to why some people appear socially inclined while others appear less so. The table, following these descriptions, shows the different explanations of social behaviours and tendency towards either operant or classically conditioned explanations in determining ways of understanding social behaviour.

## 2.4 SOCIAL INCLUSION/EXCLUSION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

### 2.4.1 *Ethology – Sign Stimulus*

Ethology explains the way in which species-specific social skills are acquired through the principle of imprinting and from which Bowlby (1982) derives attachment theory. He explains that attachment feelings stem from instinct and have a survival value. Pro-social behaviour is, therefore, learned in infancy through subtle social cues and these skills determine successful engagement in future social relationships (Hoover, 2004). Bowlby (1982) shows how a secure attachment underlies reciprocity, which is the ability to see things from others' perspectives. Attachment theory, therefore, explains the way in which social skills are linked to early parenting experiences.

Drawing on ethology, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) alludes to the significance of sign-stimulus in the pre-verbal stage of development, where imprinting of reactions occur in response to early emotional experiences. Parenting can be described as an ethological human activity. This implies that the nature of the child's dependency tie to their caregiver is part of a pre-preprogrammed set of behaviour patterns, developing in the early months of life. The purpose of this early attachment is for the child to maintain close proximity to their mother-figure, specifically for protection (Bowlby, 1979).

Later in life this early-learned behaviour activates under certain conditions and de-activates when the emotional trigger/stress is reduced (Bowlby, 1988). That is, attachment behaviour is aroused in the presence of pain, fear or fatigue but subsides when the mother-figure is near. The intensity of emotional reactions in adulthood is, therefore, in proportion to the experience of stress in the early months of life. Bowlby (1988) argues that parenting behaviour has biological roots and a survival purpose and, being pre-programmed, is not merely a matter of individual learning. He explains the importance of the process of cue-taking in the pre-verbal stage of infancy, because it involves the long-term ability to take

turns but occurs before language development. This pattern of turn-taking is necessary for smooth adult conversational interactions, but is initially instigated by the infant towards the mother-figure (Bowlby, 1988; Sroufe, 2005).

The sensitive mother-figure, therefore, needs to attune quickly to the infant's natural rhythms and attend to their behavioural needs by discovering what suits the infant in terms of their contentedness. In this way, human infants are "preprogrammed to develop in a socially cooperative way" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 9). Attachment security is about feeling safe and increasing survival and, from this foundation, social relationships can be a source of emotional arousal, because they are directly related to the hard-wired early emotional base of cognitive social understandings (Bowlby, 1951).

Holmes (1993) notes, however, that Bowlby does not subscribe to object-relations or drive-theory, classical conditioning explanations of the attachment process. Alternatively, Bowlby (1973) views the child's attachment to their mother-figure as a psychological bond, which operates as a primary motivational system of its own. That is, "affect" processes are more related to contingencies and predictabilities, as Crittenden (2005) explains.

#### *2.4.2 Ecological Systems*

Rather than focus solely on the early years, Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory proposes that many differing environmental systems impact on social behaviours. This theory promotes the idea of the ecological structure of education as a nesting of various levels of systems. These are the micro-system of the immediate family, the meso-system consisting of school and peer group, the exo-system being the neighbourhood and community and macro-system, the cultural, political and legal institutions. Ecological theory views both children's and adults' learning, in education settings, as dependent on two types of forces. The first is the characteristic of the learner in relation to their surroundings and the second, the relationships that exist between these environments. This theory proposes that differing social systems, such as the family, school, structures and cultures, all come with sets of rules and norms which interact and impact on the individual.

The same paradigm underpins the Guiding Principles of the Tasmanian Child Health and Parenting Services Strategic Plan for the Early Years (2009 – 2014) which advocates an ecological view of the child, by working with families and providing equitable access to evidence-based preventative, early childhood services.



### 2.4.3 Neurology – Emotions and Memories versus Genes

Neurology shows how mental processes respond to early-acquired triggers and associations which are stored in the long term memory. LeDoux (2012) notes that, while the subject of emotions has generated wide interest and copious major research publications, the term “emotion” is still not very well defined. For example, some arguments include the proposition that emotions are merely psychological/social constructions created by the mind. Neuroscience is helpful in explaining that survival circuits, common to all mammals, are motivating, reinforcing and arousal phenomena that unfold in the face of challenges or opportunities. These “survival circuits”:

*detect key trigger stimuli on the basis of innate programming or past experience...  
Innate evaluative networks make possible species-wide response connections that  
allow organisms to respond to specific stimulus patterns in tried and true ways...By  
entering into associations with biologically significant stimuli novel sensory events  
become learned triggers that activate survival circuits.* (LeDoux, 2012, pp. 655-656)

The issues of emotions (consciousness), perceptions and memories, according to LeDoux (1996), are mostly omitted from cognitive scientific study. He suggests that cognitive science prefers to separate the mind from consciousness and to focus on categorising the functioning, rather than the nature of thinking, reasoning and intellect. The word “emotion”, however, does not refer to anything that the brain has or does but merely provides a way to describe the feeling aspect of the brain. “Emotions are what happen rather than what we will to occur” (LeDoux, 1996, p. 19) and are the more powerful motivators of behaviour, because they drive cognitions rather than *vice versa*.

A clear explanation of intangible nature of emotions is given by Van der Kolk (1994). He explains that emotions are based on memories and, being sensations have no measurable material substance or make-up. He describes the function of the limbic system in the brain, which is associated with the emotions necessary for self-preservation and survival. The basis of mental activity is, therefore, the storage of sensations in the long term memory and retrieval of these sensations under certain circumstances. These indelible memories (sensations) return throughout the lifetime and, for this reason traumatised people tend to over-respond to stressors and seek solace in familiar settings, regardless of the rewards or pleasantness of non-familiar alternatives. People, under stress, secrete endogenous stress

hormones such as norepinephrine, which is associated with long term potentiation and over-consolidation of traumatic memories (Van der Kolk, 1994).

Conversely, people who have not experienced trauma will have more protective hormones available, such as oxytocin and endorphins, which serve to inhibit memory consolidation under stress. As memory triggers emotions and these emotions make up the mental state of the mind (Van der Kolk, 1994), the intangible nature of memory and emotions must be presumed as a separate, albeit collaborative, entity to the material make-up/function of the brain (TenHouten, 2007).

In contrast, the assumption that humans are genetically constrained is said to have originated with the eugenics movement, as Karen (1998) and Lewontin et al. (1984) suggest. They attribute this biological reductionism to drug-centred psychiatry and a conservative political agenda, which endeavours to connect science with the prevailing culture. Bowlby (1951) agrees that the relegation of a person's characteristics to inherited traits reflects Calvinist thinking.

As the Starting Smart report (Hawley, 2000) notes, genes are not responsible for social behaviour, because experiences affect the way genes are expressed in the nervous system. The neurons in the brain send messages through synapses and form the wiring in the brain, which communicate functions. This process of wiring and re-wiring occurs when new synaptic connections are formed and/or pruned throughout the life. In early childhood, if over-pruning occurs the child is deprived of what would be usually expected from early social development and, consequently, the skills meant to come naturally in the later years, will not be available.

Hawley (2000) explains that, although some areas of the brain display plasticity, others are unchangeable over time. Nonetheless, the process of epigenetics occurs as a survival mechanism, because genes can actually be altered in response to early stressful experiences (Scott, 2012). Currently, neuroscience research is able to utilise effective non-invasive ways to study brain chemistry, such as measuring the levels of the steroid hormone, cortisol, and investigating the intricate circuitry of the brain by scans (Gordon & Browne, 2011). Neuroscientists now acknowledge that brain activity is not entirely a matter of inherited genes, because genes can grow and change throughout life and for various reasons (Hawley, 2000). From a survival point of view, the inclination to behave in a pro-social manner needs to be firmly entrenched in the long term memory, with behavioural inclinations supported by the appropriate brain chemistry (Hawley, 2000). That is, the appropriate brain

chemistry, necessary for pro-social behaviour, needs to be amenable to a trust in social support, without which a more self-centred, self-preserving pathway is forged.

#### *2.4.4 Biology - Survival*

From a survival-based biological point of view, antisocial traits evolve, because highly active, uninhibited children will survive in environments where there are low levels of parental investment (Harpending & Draper, 1988). Scott (2012) explains that, although antisocial behaviour is conducive to survival in the absence of social support, in modern societies non-social behaviour is usually attributed to psychological disorders, especially within the education system. He claims that biological research findings are now challenging the way the effects of parenting practices are conceptualised.

Consequently, there is a shift from the “learning” model, which implies that reprogramming of children’s minds can be reversed, to an acknowledgement that biochemical changes are related to early parenting experiences. It is now becoming accepted that parenting practices affect the child’s neuro-hormonal functions and expression of genotype (Scott, 2012). Epigenetic re-modeling, for instance, is now accepted as a survival mechanism which ensures adaptation to perceived hostile environments. In support of this notion, Strathearn et al. (2009) find group differences in oxytocin levels associated with secure versus insecurely attached mothers and children in terms of their responses to facial cues. Sroufe (2005) adds that, severe attachment problems present as a lack of impulse control and dissociative affect and these displays of personality disorders are linked to early childhood experiences.

#### *2.4.5 Psychology – Categorisation of Non-social Traits*

Resembling a spectrum of comorbid social relationship deficits, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) categorises a long list of psychological disorders. Three of these, for example, are (1) separation anxiety disorder; the fear of being separated from the major attachment figure, (2) antisocial behavioural personality; exhibiting egocentric behaviour and a lack of empathy for others and, (3) attachment disorder; exhibiting minimal inclination to seek comfort from attachment figure before the age five. Kutchins and Kirk (2003) describe the DSM IV as the “psychiatric bible” used as a standard to diagnose and label mental syndromes, which are increasingly sought for insurance gains or to attain drugs for childhood conditions like Attention Deficit Hyper-active Disorder (ADHD)

diagnoses. The aetiology of these disorders, however, is often supposed as being linked to inherited traits as is evident in Costa and McCrae's (1992) list.

The psychological attribution of behavioural traits to heredity is exemplified by Costa and McCrae (1992), who incorporate acceptance of five major personality traits as (1) openness to experience, (2) conscientiousness, (3) extroversion, (4) agreeableness and (5) neuroticism. Following this model, the Australian Department of Family, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) report suggests that personality traits are fifty percent attributable to heredity (Heady & Warren, 2008).

Alongside genetic attribution assumptions, psychological theorists also make connections between feelings of social exclusion and actual physical pain. MacDonald and Leary (2005) suggest that extroverts experience less physical pain, because they have less fear of rejection in social situations, whereas introverts feel varying degrees of hurt more intensely. The idea that hurt feelings are physical leads MacDonald and Leary (2005) to argue that anxiety and fear can be experienced as a physical pain. This physically felt emotional pain, they conclude, can emanate from social exclusion. They further claim that physically-felt emotional pain, resulting in neuroticism, anxiety and embarrassment, is due to a heightened need for social acceptance/approval. According to MacDonald and Leary (2005), hurt feelings, felt as physical pain, are a response to anxiety, elicited by perceived or real threats of social exclusion and/or physical harm. They conclude that emotional pain must be physical, because both "social and physical pain are managed by similar psychological and physiological systems in humans" (MacDonald & Leary, 2005, p.210).

#### *2.4.6 Sociology – The Other*

Sociological explanations allude to the social construction of "the other" as deviant. The inclusivity goal of educational programs is, therefore, seen as a way to counteract these tendencies by attempting to normalise those who appear socially excluded (Corbett, 1997). This normalisation is expected to be facilitated by teachers and practitioners who become the patrollers of the boundaries of the normal social world (Erikson, 1966). From a labelling perspective, as described by Becker (1963), deviance is a socially constructed product of other people's responses; the outsider/insider, deviant/normal person being a socially constructed identity.

Ecclestone (2007) suggests that this thinking presents a problem if educational services are inclined to label all disadvantaged children (and adults) as emotionally

vulnerable. Such labelling constructs a diminished image of children's potential and resilience and has the effect of equating social exclusion with emotional dysfunction (Ecclestone, 2007). In sociology, critical theory often examines discrimination as socially constructed in terms of gender, disability, ethnic background and/or economic status. An example is Cleary's (1999) critique of attachment theory, stating that it "ignores the social and political reality of gendered lives" (1999, p. 34).

#### 2.4.7 Criminology – *The Social Offender*

As the Starting Smart Report (Hawley, 2000) advises, this thesis does not advocate blaming parents, who may be unaware of ways to foster the emotional skills necessary to enhance their children's social capabilities. Nevertheless, when parents' behaviours have become potentially harmful to children, they can contravene the law. Notified cases of child neglect/abuse can, therefore, become a criminal matter. In Tasmania, parents may be subjected to short or long term Child Protection Court orders requiring their at-risk children to be removed and placed in out-of-home care (*Children, young persons and their families Act, 1997*) section 8(2)(a). While severe cases of child abuse must be curtailed, Bowlby (1951) notes that children's deep loyalty to their parents needs to be respected, because they often prefer their own home despite the State's efforts to provide them with "new standards".

When a crime has been committed, a plea of mitigation can be entered by an accused person, but only limited recognition is placed on the affect their own parenting experiences may have had on their criminal behaviour (Green & Scholes, 2004). The major factor in law is intent and whether the offender is capable of discerning right from wrong. Expert psychiatrists are often summoned to assess whether the accused has *mens rea* (a guilty mind). This is done by determining whether he or she is suffering from either a psychological disorder or psychosis (Freckleton & Selby, 1999). A diagnosis of psychosis indicates that the accused is out of touch with reality and, therefore, unfit to plead for reasons of insanity. Those who are assessed as suffering only from psychological disorders, however, are considered able to discern right from wrong and make a choice to act in a law-abiding way.

#### 2.4.8 Social Policy – *Government Approach in Maintaining Social Wellbeing*

Australia's Social Inclusion Strategy (Australian Government, 2010) outlines the need for inclusive practice in various settings, including early childhood education, parenting and family support programs. Studies on social policy appear to embrace the psychological trait

view that socially agreeable/disagreeable traits are inherent. Zubrick et al. (2008) state, for example, that those who are “blessed” with a resilient personality can gain from supports and role modeling. Green and Scholes (2004) suggest the ideal scenario is that there is a fit between the individual’s sense of self and the expectations of others, in terms of the unspoken rules which allow membership in the wider society. They argue that social institutions, in seeking to facilitate social harmony, can create conflict by undermining the recognition that secure attachments are crucial for lifetime relationships.

Dominant values generate rewards for certain behaviours, which can have the effect of threatening the mental health of the disadvantaged. Societies are made up of people who think, feel and act in relation to others, but prevailing cultural ideas can affect understandings of what matters and impact on the lived experience of people within societies (Green & Scholes, 2004). For example, capitalist values of competitiveness and economic short-term strategies seem to conflict with social inclusion values of cooperation and commitment.

#### *2.4.9 Economic Theory – Cost-Effectiveness*

Historical economist, Offer (2006) remarks that education alone cannot redirect emotionally based problems, because it is the discord in self-seeking families that affects wellbeing. He suggests that western societies are being unreasonable in relying on affluence while ignoring the fact that children are paying the cost of inadequate parenting. On this subject, Kasser et al. (2007) add that affluent societies are offering high standards of social support but relying on education and structural improvements to redirect unhelpful behaviours in individuals, who are presumed to have inherited non-resilient, disagreeable dispositions.

Similarly, Offer (2006) agrees that the focus on economic self-regard omits emotionally-based motives by relying on informed choice and educational measures in the assumption that difficult, inflexible dispositions are inherited traits. He questions the idea that everyone is a rational chooser of economic outcomes and suggests that high rates of family disruption, in wealthy countries, is causing more suffering to disadvantaged people in those societies. Kasser et al. (2007) and Offer (2006) argue that neo-liberal capitalist values are fostering avoidant, psychologically unhealthy traits by encouraging competitiveness, self-centredness and impatience. Irrational social behaviour cannot be accounted for by economic rational analyses (Becker, 1981) and, subsequently, these traits are often perceived as inherited rather than acquired.

The following table outlines inter-disciplinary views on social inclusion behaviours.

**Table 2: Social Inclusion - Interdisciplinary Explanations and Strategies**

DISCIPLINE	SOCIAL PROBLEM	STRATEGIES – BASED ON *OPERANT/ *CLASSICAL CONDITIONING	BEHAVIOUR – CHOICE MOTIVATED BY EMOTIONS/COGNITIONS
<b>Ethology</b>	Non-social ways of behaving entrenched	Imprinting, acquisition of social behaviours in pre-verbal stage <i>Classical conditioning</i>	<b>Emotions</b> imprinting – sign stimulus - behavioural patterns revealed in transitions
<b>Ecological systems</b>	Multiple transitions Differing environments	Scientific experimental design Changed conditions reveal behavioural phenomena <i>Operant conditioning</i>	<b>Cognitive</b> behavioural Methods
<b>Neurology</b>	Changed brain chemistry – Reactive behaviour Defensive mechanisms	Chemical changes, neural substrates <i>Classical conditioning</i>	<b>Emotions</b> – triggers Long term memory from pre-verbal stage
<b>Biology</b>	Antisocial behaviour Survival mechanism	Changed brain chemistry conducive to survival <i>Classical conditioning</i>	<b>Emotions</b> – fight/flight hyper- vigilant, self-centred, coercive, reactive
<b>Psychology</b>	Psychological disorders Individual, private Inherited personality traits	Humanist - Strength based Cognitive behavioural therapy Positive psychology Medication <i>Operant conditioning</i>	<b>Cognitions</b> – change thinking to change behaviour Five major personality traits 50% inherited – <b>Choice</b>
<b>Sociology</b>	Deviant behavior Discrimination between haves and have-nots Class, economic and social inequality	Reduce labeling/discrimination Emancipation of poor/powerless Improve structures/ equal opportunities – service access <i>Operant conditioning</i>	Structural changes Social construction of disadvantage <b>Cognitions</b> , incentives <b>Choice</b>
<b>Criminology</b>	Offending, drug-related crime, mental health Community safety concerns Child Protection	Court diversion – education Therapy/rehabilitation Restorative justice Punishment/incarceration <i>Operant conditioning</i>	<b>Cognitions</b> <b>Choice</b> of right or wrong Make amends Mitigating factors
<b>Social Policy</b>	Social exclusion not conducive to social cohesion and equality Democratic principles Reduce discrimination	Promote social inclusion Promote accessible early interventions, educational and parenting programs <i>Operant conditioning</i>	Inclusive policies and practices Rational <b>Choice</b> Equal opportunity Reduce discrimination
<b>Economics</b>	Economic improvements since 1960s but high rates of mental disorders and social fragmentation continue	Improved economic, welfare and educational support to improve socio-economic outcomes. Cost saving – reduced welfare <i>Operant conditioning</i>	<b>Choice</b> motivated by means to ends rationale Economic rational choice Disagreeable traits inherited

\**Operant conditioning* – behavior repeated in anticipation of a reward (pioneered by B F Skinner)

\**Classical conditioning* - behavior, triggered by memory and involving a physical reaction to (emotionally-based) stimuli (discovered by Dr Ivan Pavlov)

Endeavouring to understand the essence of social inclusion is complex, as it involves perceptions based on judgments of what constitutes social and non-social behaviour. The different meanings attributed to the idea of social inclusion include whether behavioural inclinations are inherited/genetically-based, whether behaviour can be learned or re-learned at any stage of life, whether all behaviours are instrumentally motivated towards socially or

economically rational goals, whether cultural differences apply or the degree to which a combination of the above are relevant.

In accordance with Bourdieu (1990b), motivational influences cannot be simply perceived as an instrumental-type, economic rational choice issue, because this does not explain how social inclinations develop from early childhood cultural practices. In seeking better ways to understand how social inclusion is achieved, Bowlby (1973, 1982) suggests that the primary motivator of social behaviour derives from the initial social experience. He elaborates how this experience, in the pre-verbal stage of life, determines emotional responses, which instigate changed brain chemistry to support either social or non-social inclinations. From this premise it follows that an optimum early social experience ensures the individual develops with positive self-esteem and an ability to relate to others with respect and fairness (Bowlby, 1979). Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) add that there is a strong relationship between emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes. Pre-schoolers with aggressive and oppositional behaviours often experience problems with peers, because of their deficits in understanding emotional expression. This situation occurs because of the confusion and pain resulting from them being continuously exposed to the inappropriate negative emotions in childhood (Denham, 2006).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the way ECEC approaches are currently relied upon as a way to enhance levels of emotional wellbeing and social inclusion. Bourdieu's (1984) explanations of societal exclusion have been outlined and show how early learned cultural practices and tastes are acquired in the early familial environment. This chapter has endeavoured to highlight the way that disadvantage may relate to feelings of not belonging. These feelings can arise if a person's social behaviours are perceived inappropriate by the mainstream, making them feel inclined to withdraw to avoid feeling rejected.

The reality of social alienation, described in this chapter, is that there is actually a survival value in belonging to a cohesive social group (Allman, 2013). It is noted, however, that the interpretation of social exclusion changed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after which it became more of a term to describe marginalised groups suffering discrimination and thus being stigmatised. This shift in thinking may have altered the emphasis from the social and emotional aspects of social inclusion/exclusion to a focus on perceived stigmatised groups.



Perhaps this new way of thinking accounts for the non-acceptance of Bourdieu's (1984) misrecognition theory; that is, that people are unaware of the reasons for their struggles.

This chapter has critically explored the views expressed by some writers (Rancière, 2007; Reay, 2004; Nash, 2002; Sullivan, 2002; Hattam & Smyth, 2014), who suggest that people, including children, are rational thinkers, autonomous and able to plan and self-analyse. This rational actor notion, Bourdieu (1984) claims, is another example of an Enlightenment idea. The main issue, according to Bourdieu (1990a), is that early childhood culturally-acquired social dispositions can elicit discrimination, if not compatible with the dominant expectation of educational settings. Contemporary early childhood strategies, however, now focus on inclusive, fair and respectful practices to ensure cognitive awareness, self-regulation and a sense of identity in the independent thinking child (Theobald et al., 2013).

The idea that social behaviour is based on cognitive awareness of long term economic and social rewards is challenged in this chapter. This utilitarian view does not seem to account for emotional influences, which involve the survival need to avoid unpleasant feelings and threats to self-esteem. The complex nature of the emotional basis of social dispositions has been discussed in this chapter by outlining the difficulties in measuring these abstract constructs. As Bourdieu (1990a) suggests, the complexity of studying these pervasive motivators of social behaviours should not be a reason to dismiss and neglect to examine these phenomena. TenHouten (2007) adds that the study of emotions requires taking into account multi-disciplinary ideas, some of which have been included in this chapter to present a wider view on the subject. It is evident that disciplines differ in the way social inclusion behaviours are perceived. The main differences seem to occur in perceptions around whether social behaviour is a response to classical or operant conditioning. Similarly, it appears that notions of conservatism vary. These anomalies are evident in the claim that attachment theory follows a conservative, capitalist agenda (Duschinsky et al., 2015) and counter-claim; that scientific assumptions of inherited psychological traits relate to conservative ideology (Bowby, 1951; Karen, 1998; Lewontin et al., 1984).

Ultimately, this thesis seeks more knowledge on the deeper attachment-related aspects of social inclusion and, indeed, the gaining of socially inclusive dispositions conducive to psychosocial wellbeing. The following chapter explains the theoretical orientation of this thesis which expands on the attachment-related link to emotional security, relationship success and social skill attainment.

## CHAPTER 3 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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This chapter lays out the theoretical orientation which is considered useful in exploring the research focus. This theoretical framework involves reference to the key theories of Bowlby (1982) and TenHouten (2007) as pivotal in relation to the importance of children's emotional wellbeing and implicit in ECEC social inclusion approaches. To gain a more nuanced understanding of social inclusion, the emotional aspects of self-control/regulation are further explored; these behavioural issues being a focus in ECEC services (Moffitt et al., 2011; Theobald et al., 2013).

In this chapter, the emotional nature of self-control/regulation is explained as relating to early-acquired emotional regulation ability, being foundational for successfully negotiating social relationships (Bowlby, 1982). As TenHouten states, it is the quality of early social experiences which “profoundly impact on the development of critical self-regulatory functions, emotional control, cognitive self-definition and interpersonal expectations” (2007, p. 145). This research explores the notion that a lack of social skills, relating to an early insecure attachment experience, may create disadvantage in all aspects of social life (Bowlby, 1982). It is, therefore, suggested that the individual's acquirement of social skills has implications for ECEC approaches in facilitating societal inclusiveness.

The importance of understanding the attachment link to social inclusion is that it involves the internal working model (IWM) as an acquired notion of the self, relating to learned social behaviours. The major issue in this chapter, therefore, is to explore how attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) assists in understanding social inclusion by explaining the impact of sign stimulus, during the sensitive stage of life, in creating self-images and learned responses to others.

Acknowledgement of a need to enhance attachment security for children is evident in ECEC programs where the Circle of Security Intervention (COS), proposed by Powell et al. (2013), is implemented. While acceptance of attachment implications abounds, this thesis emphasises a need for more nuanced understandings so that practitioners and policy makers are able to recognise that observable behaviours in children and parents are a reflection of, and reaction to, their earlier social experiences and relationship history (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004).

The major issue explained in this chapter is that, from an individual and societal perspective, the acquisition of socially-inclusive dispositions seems integral for integration, or not, within mainstream society (Bourdieu, 1984). A key argument, therefore, is that despite an acceptance that emotional regulation skills have links with academic achievement and overall wellbeing (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2011), this notion does not seem to fit easily with prevailing cultural ideas of economic equality and free choice. This chapter, therefore, highlights the notion that contemporary ideas appear incompatible with children's proximity-seeking behaviours; that is, their need to feel protected so as to ensure emotional regulation, social cue interpretation, imagination, critical thinking and relationship success (Bowlby, 1982).

The proposition, in this chapter, is that early attachment experiences exert a major emotionally-driven influence on social dispositions and inclination. Based on this supposition, the connection between ECEC approaches, social inclusion values and attachment security is examined. This connection is made in the context of early childhood strategies which utilise education-based curriculum to promote equality, diversity and feelings of belonging (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009). From an attachment perspective, the ability to successfully negotiate peer relationships predicts the degree to which feelings of belonging (social inclusion) can be attained (Ladd et al., 2006; Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Denham, 2006; Seifert, 2006; Schore, 2001; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Bowlby 1973, 1982).

Consequently, if it is accepted that attachment security is the crucial element in becoming socially included, an understanding of this aspect of social belonging may need attention when implementing strategies and practices for early childhood programs. The major issue, in fully understanding social inclusion, according to Green and Scholes (2004), is to acknowledge the universal, species-specific nature of the attachment process. From an attachment perspective, the concept of social inclusion is not primarily a gender, race, class or disability issue, but relates more to social skill abilities (Green & Scholes, 2004). This is, because one's initial social experiences portend relationship success, without which social and/or economic disadvantage may occur.

In democratic societies, such as Australia, the social policy focus is on equality and justice (Wong et al., 2012) and to ensure all children have an equal opportunity to flourish (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009). This thesis highlights the importance of early childhood attachment security, because of its potential impact on adult psychosocial wellbeing/flourishing. Some theorists, such as Duschinsky et al. (2015) argue that attachment theory is merely a

conservative gender ideology, which follows the dictates of nature and neglects to consider the caregiver's social, health and political needs. Silver (2010) suggests that conservative Liberal thinking accepts the inevitability of a certain degree of disadvantage, while the Labor view is that respect and inclusiveness can deconstruct disadvantage. This thesis moves from explanations citing conservative gender ideology, to the idea that disadvantage may relate to a person's attachment experience in determining their social interaction/relationship success, or not. A key purpose of this research is to highlight the link between early attachment experience and social inclusion. In doing so, the focus is to provide understandings of the emotional basis of social behaviours in the context of ECEC goals of promoting equality and fairness as a means to enhance social inclusion and wellbeing.

When perceived as an emotional, rather than a cognitive issue, social inclusion can be understood as predominantly a by-product of a secure attachment experience, which provides the basis of the IWM. The IWM (Bowlby, 1982) is the acquired image of "the self" and learned responses toward others. These subtle responses develop in the pre-verbal, sensitive stage of life where social/emotional cues are absorbed and influence brain chemistry; this changed chemistry triggers behavioural responses/reactions to feeling associations of social events over the life span. A secure attachment experience, therefore, instigates a pro-social pathway, whereas an insecure experience foreshadows a non-social, ego-centric survival mode.

It is, therefore, important to understand the rational aspect of self-centred, non-trusting, uninhibited behaviours; that they have become a survival mechanism instigated in the absence of parental protection (Harpending & Draper, 1998). In other words, the initial attachment experience either portends social trust and pro-social inclinations or the converse, extreme independence and non-social pathways of survival. It is argued that more understanding may be needed of how this critical sensitive emotional stage of life replays in all future social encounters; attachment theory explains how this replay system occurs.

### 3.1 ATTACHMENT THEORY

Using categories devised by Bowlby's assistant, Mary Ainsworth (see Ainsworth & Bell, 1970), Watson and Tully (2008) report how an insecure attachment is divided into "avoidant" and "ambivalent" groups. They explain that "avoidant" denotes a propensity to avoid intimacy, minimisation and suppression of emotions, chronic pleasing but with an independent appearance. The second is the "ambivalent" disposition, which features

attention-seeking behaviours, such as whinging, demanding and/or threatening mannerisms (Watson & Tully, 2008). A third category, “disorganised”, added by Main & Solomon (1986), arises from childhood experiences of abusive and neglectful carers, often drug-addicted parents who have, themselves, experienced disrupted attachments. A “disorganised” attachment style develops from fractured childhood experiences, where a child suffers extreme fear from an abusive parent and/or feels responsible in the presence of a helpless parent (Crittenden & Di Lalla, 1988). This type of early experience can force the child to protect themselves, as well as their parent, and, in doing so, suppress their own emotions.

Subsequent social and psychological problems, more evident in adulthood, are linked to childhood experiences where parents elicit role-reversing and/or controlling behaviours in their children (Crittenden, 2005). Role-reversing occurs when, instead of being the protector, the parent exhibits a need to be dependent on their child. Withdrawn and depressed parents can inadvertently elicit role reversing, compulsive caregiving behaviours from children, whereas parents who harshly punish elicit their children’s compulsive compliance (Crittenden, 2005). Watson and Tully (2008) explain how these scenarios, in childhood, are linked to serious behavioural problems developing in later life.

Common attachment-related social problems include internalising or externalising behaviours, noted in children growing up in the presence of drug-addicted and/or mentally ill parents (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). These major attachment-based manifestations need to be considered when implementing social strategies, incentives and socio-educational programs for families with pre-school children, who are most in need of assistance.

Another important issue, pertinent to how ECEC programs are conceived, is that attachment-related problems may not be evident until instigated by a stressful event. Stress may arise, for a child or parent, on simply having to participate in an ECEC program and mingle with new people. For the adult, a major changeable event, such as the birth of a child, may expose the true nature of their inability to regulate their emotions (Bowlby, 1979). Such stressful life-changes can leave the struggling parent quite perplexed at their inability to cope with the strains of child rearing.

Consequently, the human need to acquire secure attachments in the pre-verbal sensitive stage of life is crucial for a person to be emotionally secure enough to cope with the demands of being a parent. An understanding of the way some parents struggle to cope may help explain their decisions to withdraw from ECEC programs, which offer much needed support.

### 3.1.1 *Emotions and Sense of Self*

Bowlby's (1973) psychoanalytical clinically-based investigation, of how a person's "way of being" is generated, led him to describe these early attachment feelings as the "working model"<sup>5</sup>. This model relates to the acquisition, or not, of adaptive socially appropriate strategies, which have implications for social and emotional experiences across the lifespan (Bowlby, 1979, 1982). According to Schore (2001), this ability in the young child, to appropriately negotiate social interactions with peers, depends upon an efficiency of the right hemispheric ability to engage in the processes of affective synchrony with others.

Furthermore, this capacity involves a non-conscious ability to efficiently read faces and tones of voices in order to predict intentions and understand how others feel; this ability to communicate involves regulating one's own emotional states to cope with interpersonal stressors (Schore, 2001). Gordon and Browne (2011) note that being able to negotiate relationships is primary to social and emotional development and has an influence on brain function. They state that the child needs to develop self-awareness before developing awareness of others and concede that attachment relationships, leading to an ability to interact socially, are the foundations of emotional and social development. Attachment relationships, therefore, become the working models which are derived from the ties children form with their parents, and from where they obtain their emotional resources.

Harris (2000), however, critiques the notion of a connection between parent-child and child-peer social systems and suggests that behaviour and relationships are genetically determined and, therefore, parents/families having little impact on their child's social development. On the contrary, Bowlby (1973) explains that it is not within genes but within the family micro-culture that all psychosocial difficulties, relating to early attachment issues, arise. Drawing on ethology, Bowlbian theory emphasises the biological and psychological bases of the intense need for reciprocal mother-infant relationships.

Bowlby's genius, as Hoover (2004) relates, was in recognising this process by expanding on the ethological principle of imprinting, developed by Konrad Lorenz in the 1930s. Imprinting refers to the rapid learning process occurring in the sensitive period of development (Hoover, 2004). Evidence, showing the importance of experiencing an early

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<sup>5</sup> John Bowlby's (1973) book, *Attachment and Loss: Vol 2 Separation, Anxiety and Anger* describes "working models" as "states of mind, representations of the world and self and internalised perceptions of events and forecasts of the future impacting on how one then constructs a plan of action" (1973, p. 236).

secure attachment, is based on Bowlby's (1979, 1982) numerous, rigorous observational studies of children, separated from their parents during the Second World War. Attachment theory enables a link to be made between social inclusion and early-bonding-related social skill acquisition, as an emotional rather than cognitively-learned capability.

### *3.1.2 Social Skills – Negative Affect*

In exploring the implications of social skills, the attachment process appears as the instigator of social inclinations, which are acquired from early social experiences (Bowlby, 1973, 1982). Cooley (1902) explains how “the self” develops through the judgments and actions of other people and that these interactions occur in early childhood and continue throughout life. Social and physical realities are, therefore, qualitatively different between individuals, because the concept of the self relates to a person's actual experience as well their perceptions of others' responses to them.

In other words, social interaction is a two-way process and is highly dependent on the perceptions and expectations, held within one's emotional sense of self. Accordingly, emotions appear to be the basis of cognitive learning rather than *vice versa*, and for this reason social behaviour may not be explained simply by rational choice logic (Bourdieu, 1990b). The major point, to be understood from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1982), is that social interactions are based on early acquired perceptions of the self and others. These perceptions, in turn, impact on social inclinations, because of the learned ability, or not, to participate in unfamiliar social gatherings.

Although humans may be presumed as thinking and goal-seeking, the influences which motivate social behaviour are not always known or socially rational, because the mind is social and the concept of society a mental structure (Cooley, 1902). People are made up of all the experiences they have had and, because their reactions and actions are mostly spontaneous, this puts the idea of intentions into question (Bourdieu, 1990a).

From an individual perspective a person without a secure IWM will find all social relationships problematic in varying degrees proportionate to the stresses imposed on the psyche and brain during their infancy (Bowlby, 1973, 1982). The important issue is that the establishment of emotional bonds is a biological function, which creates the working model of “the self”, but the strength of these bonds is directly related to one's early caregiving experience (Bowlby, 1973, 1982). This sense of self has repercussions in determining whether some parents and children will feel comfortable and included in new groups. This is,

because the sense of self is maintained by the central nervous system and is reflected in both responses and expectations of treatment from others; the term “negative affect” referring to adverse expectations in social relationships (Bowlby, 1988). The issue of negative affect is significant, because cognitive disturbances, arising from hostile childhood experiences, perpetrate a non-trustful feeling towards others and a sense of foreboding as to one’s own social success/competence.

Bowlby’s (1988) explanation of negative affect aligns with Bourdieu’s *habitus* (1984) theory, which suggests that people estimate their probability of success or failure in situations, based on their early childhood cultivated dispositions. The development of non-trustful and negative estimations of self-worth, and other people’s intent, is directly related to an early-learned feeling of proximity and protection (Bowlby, 1988). Negative affect may, therefore, hinder some people from entering into a new group situation, because they are already expecting a stressful experience, which in turn elicits a negative appraisal from others.

### *3.1.3 Proximity Behaviours – Protective Strategies*

The way a negative affectation arises may need more understanding, especially when instigating early childhood and family socio-educational programs aimed at promoting social inclusion. This thesis, by drawing on attachment theory, highlights the way “negative affect” revolves around proximity seeking behaviours; that is, it relates to the infants’ experience of total dependency on the support of others, namely their attachment figure (Bowlby, 1988). Ultimately, this original proximity experience becomes a protective strategy, ensuring the child grows up with a secure sense of being able to rely on others for support and care. A secure sense of attachment also enables the child to confidently explore their environment and engage with other people. In other words, the importance of a secure attachment experience is that it has huge repercussions on a person’s feelings of self-worth and their overall confidence in securing and maintaining social relationships.

As Bowlby (1988) explains, the critical aspect of the attachment experience is that it remains active during the lifetime and affects all thoughts and behaviours related to support-seeking and social resilience. Ultimately, a secure attachment experience ensures a positive expectation that other people will be available to help, along with a positive self-regard and sense of capability and worth. Conversely, an anxious or avoidant attachment experience, during the pre-verbal emotional stage of infancy, can lead to the formation of a negative representation of the self and others. This negative expectation leads to doubts about self-



worth and other people's goodwill, culminating in an overall lack of trust. In this scenario, rather than proximity strategies, other non-social inclinations develop (Bowlby, 1988). The effects of a particular attachment style impact on affect regulation; that is an anxious style features a high fear of rejection and over dependency, whereas an avoidant style presents as compulsive self-reliance and emotional distance (Bowlby, 1988).

Nonetheless, both anxious and avoidant styles involve an inability to rely on proximity-type supports. That is, in the absence of trust there is no reliance on any social means available to relieve stress, so secondary strategies of over-dependence or under-dependence are adopted to enlist support (Bowlby, 1988). These types of behaviours, used to gain support, are directly related to the patterns of attachment strategies used by infants to shape their parents' behaviours.

The ideal scenario is that the child experiences predictable interpersonal contingencies which will assist them in developing feelings of connectedness throughout their lives (Crittenden, 2005). In order for secure attachment feelings to develop, however, it is crucial for the mother-figure to bring their own rhythms into accord with their baby's arousal, as this assists in modulating the child's stress.

The ability to regulate emotions, therefore, occurs when the infant learns how to elicit a positive response from their primary caregiver as this gives them confidence in their interpretation of, and reaction to, social cues. This process ensures an ability to feel socially included but needs to occur from the first days of life and throughout the pre-verbal emotionally-sensitive stage, Crittenden (2005) suggests. Subsequently, the effects of maltreatment, in terms of extreme neglect or over-vigilance, will have already occurred by the middle of the second year of life, by which time neurological maturation has initiated a major period of psychological change. An understanding of the attachment process involves a realisation that a child who experiences an anxious/avoidant attachment style will be at risk of social isolation (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004).

Social isolation occurs when the child fails to develop trust and, being incapable of disclosing their needs, will not receive the support they need in a social way. The anxious/avoidant child, being emotionally and socially isolated, will exhibit antisocial behaviours like lying, insensitivity and bullying and/or withdrawn behaviours, none of which are responsive to interventional therapy (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Other features of attachment problems, which are exasperating to those who try to help, are a lack of emotion, problems with concentration and a tendency to be evasive (Bowlby, 1988). Although these

types of behaviours may appear more obvious in older children or parents, they still need to be understood within ECEC approaches which aim to support those who are most in need.

#### *3.1.4 Depressive and Aggressive Behaviours Linked*

It is also important for social policy and ECEC approaches to understand that two interconnected manifestations of attachment difficulties can present as opposite behaviours (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Two seemingly opposing, but inter-connected, reactions to an adverse attachment experiences can present as either withdrawn/depressive and/or reactive/aggressive behaviours. In describing these reactions, emanating from an insecure attachment experience, Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) state that some individuals will behave in a withdrawn manner while others, who display an anxious/resistant style, show a propensity to exaggerate emotional stress and engage in self-focused disclosure.

So while some withdraw, other individuals appear over-stimulated, impulsive and easily frustrated. Ladd et al. (2006) add that proactive aggression is instrumentally motivated and directed towards the goal of domination, whereas covert aggression appears in the form of intentional manipulation. Bowlby (1988) further explains how these seemingly opposite behaviours, aggressive and withdrawn, hostile and helpless, are similar in that they are both attention-seeking strategies.

In addressing social inclusion, social policy and ECEC approaches may need more understanding of disorganised attachment implications; that is, the children affected have either been frightened by their parents or perceive them as being frightened (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Displays of disorganised attachment may occur in children having experienced aggressive, punitive, controlling and/or manipulative parenting. More awareness is, therefore, needed in clearly understanding separation distress in disorganised children; that is, they exhibit disruptive behaviours because of their failure to develop coping strategies. During stressful social situations, the “disorganised” child can oscillate between defensive aggressive and/or withdrawal behaviours, because of their difficulty in responding appropriately to others. Traits of victimhood and bullying seem, therefore, to be connected as both these behaviours are signals of a lack of social trust (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). This situation occurs due to a person’s lack of trust, which is connected to their inability to regulate emotions and consequential incapacity to engage in socially agreeable ways.

An important factor to be understood, around perceptions of aggression and victimhood, is that both are examples of non-social mechanisms to manipulate support. In

being able to fully understand a parent or child, who appears unable to negotiate social relationships in an open and fair manner, it may be helpful to realise that the major issue is their incapacity to regulate emotions (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). These explanations, of non-social ways of gaining support, are not meant as a condemnation of parents and/or children but, instead as a way to promote understanding of how the inability to regulate emotions pervades all social behaviours and relationships. An inability to regulate emotions is sometimes described as a lack of self-control; the latter being a more negative term as it implies a certain weakness (Moffitt et al., 2011). Perceptions around lacks of self-control/regulation may, therefore, require more scrutiny when promoting social inclusion within contemporary ECEC approaches.

### *3.1.5 Self-regulation/Control*

The subject of self-control/regulation is becoming of increasing interest and it is now accepted that a lack of self-control is linked to health, wellbeing and crime issues (Moffitt et al., 2011). The contemporary social policy expectation is that public health and safety outcomes can be improved by early childhood programs aimed at enhancing self-control. Moffitt et al., (2011) note that self-control/regulation issues are discussed at length in research concerned with examining social behaviours. They describe how neuroscientists explain self-control as an executive function of the frontal cortex of the brain, and that this knowledge is prompting geneticists to try and isolate a self-control gene.

The implications of lack of self-control/regulation include hyper-activity, impulsivity and compulsive disorders in children, and over-eating, smoking, risk-taking and criminal tendencies in adults. Although self-control levels may be malleable, Moffitt et al. (2011) find that low self-control behaviours, in pre-schoolers, do predict adult health, wealth and safety outcomes. They suggest that policies need to focus on enhancing self-control in children, as a way to reduce the government costs associated with low self-control lifestyles. While no mention of the attachment implications of self-control and emotional regulation appear in their paper, Moffitt et al. (2011) conclude that more understanding of the key ingredients in self-control is needed.

Interestingly, although self-regulation is not as easily measured as are IQ and literacy levels, it is generally agreed that the ability to self-regulate needs to be acquired in the early years and is a major component of psychosocial wellbeing (McCain et al., 2007). Gordon and Browne (2011) claim that self-regulation can be taught and practitioners can help

children regulate emotions by teaching them to read others' feelings. They advise the use of body language or tone of voice to teach "bullies" better social skills.

Rather than being taught post-infancy, Bowlby (1988), Crittenden (2005) and Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) suggest that these social skills need to have been acquired very early in life. Crittenden (2005) adds that by school age, or even pre-school age, it is too late to engender self-regulation skills. Even by the age of three months, any unpredictable responses on the part of the mother-figure can lead the child to intermittent positive reinforcement of negative affect. In this scenario, Crittenden (2005) adds, cognition fails and emotional reactions overwhelm the infant, because parent and child are unable to reciprocate and inhibit negative affect. As Ladd et al. (2006) state, it is in infancy that the initial development of interpersonal difficulties begins and portends chronic lifestyle stressors, such as poverty, family dysfunction and homelessness.

The main issue to be understood, according to Bowlby (1951), is that children with distressed and/or needy parents can become disorganised and unable to calm their emotional arousal. He suggests that children, growing up in families who are in a constant state of chaos, frequently moving house or with drug and alcohol dependencies, may fail to develop social empathy and often become socially isolated. Infants also become stressed and feel threatened in the presence of an unfamiliar stranger (Bowlby, 1979). For this reason, an increased risk, for children living with step-parents, is that they may grow up in the presence of a non-affectionate feedback.

Ultimately, family discord rather than genes leads to social deficits, epitomised in children (later adults) becoming disorganised and/or controlling. Bowlby (1951) explains that, without an ability to follow rules and order, children grow up with no skills to plan, budget or organise their lives. Experiences of a chaotic disorganised lifestyle can impinge on children's and adults' emotional feelings when entering unfamiliar settings, even those offering assistance and support. These explanations, provided by Bowlby (1951), may assist ECEC approaches in further understanding the core issues facing those who struggle socially.

### *3.1.6 Peer Relationships*

A major corollary of a disorganised lifestyle is the inability to form appropriate relationships and gain support networks, of which the implications are profound. Ladd et al. (2006) explain how a combination of problems associated with childhood anxiety, depression and oppositional behaviours, are all related primarily to an inability to attain and maintain

successful friendships and relationships. Consequently, the ineptitude in forming relationships appears to have the most adverse consequences on the child's (later adult) ability to become socially included. This pattern is repeated through generations as the child becomes an adult, with only their own parenting/relationship experiences to draw upon in bringing up their own children (Bowlby, 1988). A significant factor to be understood within ECEC approaches, is that social interactions will be fraught with difficulties for children (and their parents) lacking the wherewithal to negotiate social situations.

Conversely, securely attached children are advantaged, because they will have already developed high levels of social competence, assuring them enhanced peer interactions. High quality friendship participation, relationships, support networks and positive affect correlate with high levels of peer acceptance (Ladd et al., 2006). The child, whose relationship with their parents engenders connectedness and autonomy, will, understandably, have higher levels of social competence than those whose parents minimise their own feelings.

The point that may need more understanding is that superficial relationships, and an inability to care for others or make friends, are the major feature of an inappropriate attachment experience (Bowlby, 1988). Troy and Sroufe (1987) explain the repercussions of an early caregiver setting where an "anxious-resistant" or "anxious-avoidant" attachment experience occurs. That is, this experience pervades all social encounters and provides a precedent for the child's exposure to peer victimisation. Furthermore, there are two distinct, but interchangeable parenting styles that can be destructive; these are (1) abusive and/or neglectful caregiving and (2) intrusive and/or controlling parenting (Ladd et al., 2006).

Overprotective parenting practices, rather than offering protection, also increase a child's risk of peer problems, including victimisation. As Ladd et al. (2006) explain, harsh discipline-type parenting styles teach children to engage in antisocial behaviours, such as coercive rather than social means of achieving goals in peer relationships. They note that the child's autonomy and confidence are undermined when parental discipline is unpredictable, over-controlling or psychologically manipulative.

These types of parental behaviours make it difficult for the child to take initiative and appropriately assert themselves in peer situations. If a child experiences extreme forms of psychological and emotional parental control, they may become submissive and, suffering chronic fear of disapproval, be prone to victimisation and psychological problems (Ladd et al., 2006). It seems critical, therefore, that children obtain emotional resources and internal working models of relationships from the ties they form with parents because they transfer

these resources and schema to other non-parental relationships (Ladd et al., 2006; Bowlby, 1973).

Nevertheless, Bowlby (1973) strongly asserts that, even though parents may play the main role in the way their children acquire social behaviours; this is not a moral condemnation as their behaviours have also been determined by their own childhood experiences. As the damage from early social experience is mostly observable in later life, it was Bowlby's (1973, 1982) sincere hope that understandings of attachment processes would drive social policies and, thus, prevent future generations suffering social deprivation and isolation.

An understanding of the importance of parenting is evident in contemporary ECEC approaches where high value is placed on parental involvement. For example, both in Australia and the UK, parental involvement in ECEC programs is being recognised as a major priority in the promotion of socio-educational wellbeing (Whalley, 2007). Attachment-based understandings of the parent-child regulatory synchronicity can no longer be denied, because these are now supported by neuro-anatomical studies (Hoover, 2004). Evidence of the neuro-biological impact of emotional development, described by Schore (1994), supports the claim that the child's early relationship experience affects growth, development and peer relationships (Ladd et al., 2006). A lack of exposure to appropriate parenting practices impacts on the child's peer relationships, because the child is unable to model socially competent behaviours and learn appropriate emotional reaction to distress. Aggressive behaviours, noted in children at pre-school are, therefore, a predictor of maladjustment and poor peer relationships in later life (Ladd et al., 2006).

A key point that may be less understood within ECEC approaches is that both externalising and internalising behaviours are signs of social deprivation. Rather than striking out, however, the withdrawn child makes few requests of others and is mostly ignored (Ladd et al., 2006). It is this combination of withdrawn behaviour and anxiety that leads to a higher risk of a child internalising problems and being rejected, because their behaviours shape the way others respond to them. Misunderstandings can occur when practitioners are deceived by the behaviour of some children, who seem obedient in the confines of school. Later, however, these children's inability to sustain loyal relationships can render them unable to cope in many aspects of post-school life (Bowlby, 1951). Heading towards extreme social isolation, the withdrawn person avoids human contact and is inclined towards becoming a depressed and lonely "lone wolf" (Bowlby, 1951). Understanding the

way social relationship styles develop in response to early attachment experiences are shown on the following table:

**Table 3: Development of Relationship Style over the Life-span**

<b>Primary caregiver</b> <i>Maternal handling</i>	<b>Infancy</b> <i>Attachment pattern</i>	<b>Childhood</b> <i>Relationship style</i>	<b>Adolescence</b> <i>Internal world</i>	<b>Adulthood</b> <i>Thinking about self and other representations</i>
<b>Secure:</b> Responsive Consistent Nurturing	Secure attachment Trusting	Social Independent	Friendship group acceptance	Chooses suitable, kind partner, - aware of cues Popular and can read body language - not easily dominated but assertive and fair - socially coherent – memories/ conflicts resolved
<b>Insecure Disorganised:</b> Inconsistent Disengaged Neglectful	Ambivalent Insecure	Shy/hostile Possessive Aggressive Socially inept Low dependency	Unable to make Friends Under-controlled	Unpopular, naïve Unable to read cues or facial expressions Chooses uncaring relationships Show disregard for own and others' safety Over-sensitive to other people's needs Sadness unresolved
<b>Insecure Dismissive:</b> Unresponsive Controlling	Avoidant Insecure Clingy Anxious	Aggressive Manipulative Distant with peers – hostile	Exploitative Over-controlled Sadness unresolved	Uses people – Popular Duplicitous – Superficial relationships – lacks empathy - avoids intimacy – poor recall and self-awareness – uses defensive strategies

*Excerpt from Holmes (1993)*

The above table shows that the major predictor of a successful/unsuccessful social life is the infantile experience of secure/insecure, under/over-controlling parent handling. Ladd et al. (2006) note that the current strategy of encouraging parents with young children to participate in ECEC programs represents acceptance of the link between parents' socialisation practices and their children's peer relationships. Ladd and Pettit (2002) also find direct influences, from parent's socialising methods, that relate to their child's ability to interact with peers. Acknowledgment of the way parents' own learned behaviours, beliefs and relationship patterns influence their child's social learning, has led to a trend to include parents in programs aimed at facilitating social inclusion (Scott, 2012).

The UK's Pen Green concept, for example, advocates parental involvement in integrated early childhood and parenting services (Whalley, 2007). Contemporary ECEC

approaches place importance on parents being involved, having a voice and speaking up for their children (Whalley, 2007). In reality, however, making friends and being social may be easier for some people than for others (Ladd et al., 2006). Those who have experienced secure attachments/ties with their parents, for instance, will have already developed high degrees of social competence. Feeling social included, therefore, comes naturally to children (and adults) who have higher levels of peer acceptance and an ability to acquire larger support networks (Ladd et al., 2006).

### *3.1.7 Feeling Socially Included*

Being accepted in peer groups is a social task all children confront and it is important to understand what predisposes positive inclusion (acceptance) or negative exclusion (rejection) outcomes. According to Ladd et al. (2006), rejected children bring aversive behaviour into new play situations. They explain how reactive aggression is the aversive behaviour elicited by children displaying emotional or defensive reactions to real or perceived peer provocation. Ladd et al. (2006) find that passive victims display anxious emotional reactions and fear in contrast to aggressive victims, who are more prone to externalising behaviours and displaying restlessness. Interestingly, the thought patterns of children who display passive and/or aggressive behaviours both appear to differ from the majority of children; that is, in the way that they seem to misinterpret others' motives as malevolent. Both aggressive and passive behaviours are, therefore, simply displays of an inability to negotiate social relationships; the former an outward display of social stress, the latter a withdrawn reaction. Both aggressive and passive behaviours appear indicative of an inability to know how to behave in a socially inclusive manner. Ironically, the social stress signalled in both aggressive and passive behaviours is actually related to a basic need to feel connected and included, but which is overwhelmed by a stronger need to avoid feeling rejected (Bowlby, 1988). This is another complex behavioural issue which may need more understanding so that policy and practice strategies can appropriately address social inclusion within ECEC programs.

This research invites thinking into the deeper meaning of social inclusion as an emotional feeling directly related to the earliest social experience in infancy. Discerning ways to facilitate social inclusion may need to involve understanding of how attachment-related emotional and social relationship deficits contribute to social isolation. The concept of social inclusion may, therefore, need to extend beyond being simply a matter of choice, availability of opportunities and easy access to support programs.



While participation and access may be helpful, parents also need to be in possession of a certain degree of insight, sociability and self-drive (Watson et al., 2005) to be able to feel motivated to attend support programs. This thesis emphasises that gaining and maintaining these feelings of social inclusion and self-esteem, throughout life, firstly requires an acquired ability to secure appropriate and meaningful relationships (Bowlby, 1988). It is the initial social relationship in infancy that portends the social skill ability necessary to become socially included and, although problems may be observed early in life, the symptoms become more evident during transitions, when social relations change or are put under stress.

Overall, gaining the skills necessary to successfully negotiate social relationships requires an early-acquired ability to regulate emotions and understand social cues (Ladd et al., 2006). Without these skills, social interactions, especially in unfamiliar environments, can be stressful. This research, therefore, highlights that the most basic human need in infancy and throughout life, is to secure close emotional ties with which to ensure feelings of protection, comfort and support (Bowlby, 1988). This foundation is ensured by a secure attachment experience, which allows the emotional regulation and growth of resilience needed to be able to explore new environments and make friends.

### 3.2 EMOTIONS

This point, on which Bowlby (1979) draws attention, is that the sensitive, pre-verbal stage of infancy is the time during which the intensity of responses to emotional stimuli is forged. He explains that this capacity to regulate emotions is foundational for the personality to flourish in a social sense, because it enables an ability to dissipate anxiety and regulate conflict. The importance of emotional regulation skill, Bowlby (1979) suggests, is that it relates to feelings experienced in infancy, which can be triggered by association with similar feelings elicited in future social encounters. Bowlby (1979) argues that emotions are implicit in a person's ability to negotiate social situations and achieve successful friendships and relationships.

TenHouten's substantial examination of the social life of emotions substantiates Bowlbian theory by summarising emotions as:

*ways in which individuals deal with the people and events they encounter in the social world, as they react to complex social situations...emotions are ways of coping and adapting to the social situations that life presents. (2007, p.2, 3)*

Bowlby (1969/1982) describes emotions as representing action, while feelings relate to experience (affect). Emotions are often described as “feelings” but the difference is that emotions involve action, whereas feelings relate to internal states of mind (TenHouten, 2007). The action part of emotions is evident in body movements, facial expression and conversation. People are highly motivated towards maintaining emotional wellbeing and avoiding negative feelings, because these feeling states are reactions to a disruption of homeostasis. Ultimately, emotions are an adaptive reaction to social relationships and a sign that a social situation is in need of attention. Emotions are the motivational force influencing the type of behaviour, estimated as best for the specific circumstance (TenHouten, 2007).

Paradoxically, although emotions are crucial for rational thought, the initial helpful reaction to a certain situation can often become a rigid belief system. These rigid beliefs can permeate future situations, which are perceived as similar but for which the original emotional reaction is no longer helpful. Subsequently, as TenHouten (2007) suggests, seemingly irrational behaviours can be embarked upon, because of the emotional feelings aroused in the presence of perceived threats, relating to a prior event. He further explains that the original stressful association (emotional affect) most likely would have occurred in the pre-verbal sensitive stage of life, where the sensations remain stored in the long term memory. Adult experiences can, thus, trigger a traumatic memory from infancy even though these memories mostly operate below the level of consciousness.

This thesis highlights the importance of understanding how negative social behaviours are a response to earlier social experiences which have elicited negative expectations. Equally, the need for emotional equilibrium can instigate socially irrational behaviour as a way to avoid an unbalanced emotional state leading to unhappiness and mental disorders (TenHouten, 2007). To explain seemingly irrational behaviours, such as avoiding possibly friendly social situations, it appears that a previous emotional association with a similar situation can cause an urge to flee even though a threat no longer exists. Emotions facilitate an adaptation to life problems and sometimes this adaptation may involve a non-socially oriented action, which can even be dangerous to the self and others. Dangerous situations can occur, because emotions relate to passions which can be self-centred and uncontrollable. As passions are solely concerned with self-preservation, they may involve destructive outcomes. An understanding of emotions is the essence in understanding human behaviour and for this reason the discipline of sociology must not only study cognitions, but also emotions (TenHouten, 2007). People, without an ability to regulate emotions, find it difficult

to deal confidently with social situations and relationships and, as a result, are often unable to formulate realistic goals (Bowlby, 1973). Understanding the way emotions influence social behaviours has implications in knowing what drives people to behave in certain ways, in specific situations. Feeling states, relating to emotions, are described by Bowlby (1969/1982) as “affect processes”, but are concerned with appraisal and selection rather than motivations.

Although not conceding to the primacy of the attachment experience, Greenberg et al. (1990) accept Bowlby’s appraising processes as threefold; being ways to (1) control behaviour, (2) monitor the situation and (3) convey information through facial expression and body language. They support Bowlby’s view that cognitive development is elicited in response to initial security feelings, gained from the proximity and availability of the primary caregiver during the pre-verbal stage. TenHouten (2007) adds that if the child’s infantile experience is secure and supportive their emotions will be positively oriented.

In contrast, if the child’s environment is not conducive to a positive attachment experience, stress hormones, namely cortisol, will elevate and result in high levels of arousal. Throughout life these arousal hormones are activated when memories of the original traumatic experience are triggered. Under these circumstances, the regions of the cortex and limbic system in the brain, related to attachment security and emotional regulation, will not be adequately stimulated. TenHouten (2007) explains that although pair-bonding is crucial for wellbeing this process needs to be activated by the limbic system. He states that the main indicator of a negative early attachment experience is an inability to self-regulate emotions and this problem becomes highly evident in adolescence when there is an increased need to cope with interpersonally stressful experiences.

Transitional factors are an important issue for this thesis because they demonstrate how early childhood social problems may not be evident until a stressful change/transition occurs. It often the case that social problems remain dormant until an event triggers an underlying inability to cope (TenHouten, 2007). Bowlby’s attachment theory (1973, 1982), substantiated by Ladd et al. (2006), Crittenden (2005) and Scott (2012), shows how early infancy experience portends emotionally-based social success. Nevertheless, Gordon and Browne (2011), Greenberg et al. (1990) and Stenseng et al. (2014) prefer the idea that the event itself, occurring any time over the life-span, triggers the social stress. TenHouten (2007) argues that it is not events but poor parent-child bonding that leads to poor quality social relationships and the development of a hostile misanthropic character. This thesis highlights the difference between supposing that a transitional event, itself, is the cause of

stress or whether an over-reaction to a changeful event is merely a symptom of already-present emotional fragility. These different interpretations of transitional stress may determine the efficacy of contemporary ECEC social inclusion strategies. Although complex, enhanced understandings of the emotional implications of social inclusion may assist contemporary ECEC approaches in facilitating social connectedness.

This research thesis emphasises that the difference between being socially included and excluded is profound, because it involves one's self-concept and expectations of other people's reactions, both of which elicit responses to accord with those expectations. The responses of others mirror expectations, which are based on previous social experiences and manifest in body language signals (Cooley, 1902). Internal feelings are expressed in external emotional reactions and this understanding belies the idea that feelings of social inclusion may be a cognitive issue to be learned, post-infancy, simply through information provision and instruction. Furthermore, since being socially included involves complex, mostly non-conscious, processes, such as body language, emotional affect and sense of entitlement, these social dispositions may be difficult to reverse by instruction alone (Bourdieu, 1984). For example, the significance of early childhood imagination is indication of the complex nature of the development of emotional and socio-psychological wellbeing.

### *3.2.1 Imagination and Emotions*

The way the child learns to relate to others is of primary importance and Seifert (2006) suggests that pretend play, in early childhood, is the way to stimulate this metacognition. Metacognition is otherwise known as thinking about one's own thinking and being able to understand the mental states of others (Seifert, 2006). Vygotsky (1933/1978) stresses the importance of make-believe play for children in the development of their imagination. His theory suggests that social knowledge is gained through language and that intelligence is the ability to learn from instruction (Newman & Holzman, 2014). The emphasis is, therefore, on the importance of scaffolding, which is the instructional support children receive to assist with their cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that by the age of seven, children are able to engage in thinking, which includes being capable of abstract thinking and having social awareness. The presumption is that thinking enables children to refrain from impulsive urges and to be able to follow social rules. Vygotsky (1978) adds that children learn social skills by enacting the expectations of social norms in imaginative play.

The concept of “theory of mind” is an awareness of thinking in terms of the self and others and is discussed by Bretherton and Beeghly (1982) as the ability to feel empathy and behave in a pro-social manner. Nevertheless, while it is accepted that the role of imaginative play is crucial in the development of social behaviours, the question remains as to how a child becomes inclined to engage in imaginative play, initially. What is the source of a child’s inability to empathise and imagine how other people will feel or react?

To provide answers, Bowlby (1969/1982) explains that an inability to engage in imaginative play coincides with an inability to concentrate, to feel empathy or to dissipate anxiety, anger and guilt. A lack of this critical ability is exhibited in children who have experienced insecure attachment experiences in infancy, rendering them incapable of abstract thinking and logical reasoning (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Without these early-acquired social skills and expectations of support, children grow up with a tendency to manipulate support in a self-centred passive and/or aggressive way. It seems that there is no argument around the need for children to acquire social skills through pretend play (Seifert, 2006) but the major concern is whether this skill can be taught or if it needs to be acquired in the pre-verbal stage of life, where emotional feelings are forged (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Opinions differ about the development of empathetic, reciprocal social behaviour, in deciding whether this is primarily an emotional or purely a cognitive process. Watson et al. (2012) suggest that children can learn these social skills within early intervention programs. The difficulty with the cognitivist view, Goleman (2007) remarks, is that social intelligence is presumed to be on the same sphere as other intelligences. The assumption that social inclusion acquisition is a cognitive issue may impart the idea that a child’s social deficits can be remedied by inclusive educational means. In contrast, when social inclusion is viewed as emotionally-based, a more nuanced understanding of the way social skills develop may ensue and assist contemporary ECEC approaches in supporting families most in need of assistance.

### *3.2.2 Cognitive Approach*

In recent times, the cognitive approach, which assumes the logical operation of the mind and its hierarchical development, has become the basis of therapeutic interventions (Holmes, 1993). Cognitive behavioural methods (Beck, 1976) are often used in therapy and assume an ability to freely choose, absorb information and engage in retrospective thought, restraint and forward planning. A difficulty, in following this line of thinking, is outlined by Bowlby (1969/1982). He suggests, for example, that the provision of information on parenting may

yield some success but it is not what parents do, but how they do it, that is the issue. As Bowlby (1969/1982) explains, an anxious parent, after reading all the material on parenting, still remains an anxious parent.

Similarly, the Bourdieuan position is that the problem of disadvantage is not in what people do, but how they do it. This idea is critiqued by Thomson (2005), who suggests that Bourdieuan theory focuses too much on unconscious habits. Thomson (2005) suggests that the idea of misrecognition is a tautology in proposing that people are unaware of their domination/exclusion, simply because they do not understand, or realise, how this situation occurs. Hattam and Smyth (2014) also discount the Bourdieuan ideas of misrecognition and the cultural reproduction of inequality. They concur with Rancière (2007) who suggests that the education system treat all children as equal, capable of critical thinking and possessing insight into their own social lives. Rancière (2007) opposes the Bourdieuan notion of misrecognition; the proposition that some people do not succeed academically because their *habitus* (disposition) prevents them from being able to formulate a scholarly discourse. According to Rancière (2007) this idea predisposes an unequal identity and he argues that social justice can be achieved if educational opportunities are fairly distributed so that all people can be treated as equals. Bourdieu (1990a) explains that the main schism in these arguments is between those who assume reason precedes social action and those who believe historical experiences can provide the most objective analyses of behavioural patterns.

An example of the reasoned actor view, which assumes all students have an innate ability to critically appraise, is implicit in Gordon and Browne's (2011) suggestion that mental process are the faculty children use in acquiring knowledge. They add that children draw on conscious thought and memory to think about themselves, the world and others. This point of view assumes that "educating the thinking child is a critical function of parents and teachers" and that "curriculum in the early years must address the thinking, or cognitive, skills" (Gordon & Browne, 2011, p. 395).

This cognitive approach perceives social skills as the strategies children draw on to enable them to behave appropriately and manage social interactions in many environments. From this perception, social cognition is perceived as the application of thinking to personal and social behaviour (Gordon & Browne, 2011). In taking the social cognitive perspective, social skills can be described as an ability to interpret events, make decisions and consider the consequences of one's behaviour on others. The presumption that thinking precedes social learning makes it possible to rely on teachers to motivate children towards desiring enjoyable

social contact. Consequently, teachers/practitioners are expected to be social organisers, able to create the physical and interpersonal environments in which to promote children's social skill development. The cognitive assumption is that all pre-school children are capable of learning to behave in a more socially inclusive manner by means of instruction and example.

### 3.2.3 Assuming Everybody as Socially Inclined

The presumption that all pre-school children are socially inclined and capable of learning social behaviours omits the notion that some may have already acquired non-social inclinations (Bowlby, 1988). The reliance on instruction and information, as a way to change a person's social inclination, stems from the cognitive approach proposed by Beck (1976), which assumes the logical operation of the mind and that cognitions determine emotions, rather than *vice versa* (Holmes, 1993). This view assumes that all people are able freely to choose, absorb information and engage in retrospective thought, restraint and forward planning (Holmes, 1993). The following table shows different types of social response:

**Table 4: Difference in Being Socially Included and Excluded**

<b>SOCIALLY INCLUDED</b> Socially-based Cognitions	<b>SOCIALLY EXCLUDED</b> Emotionally-based Cognitions
Have trust in the expectation of fairness and support from others	Lack trust – resort to manipulating support to get needs met
Can construct a plan of action Use instrumental rational choice	Reactive – in the moment - disorganised Respond to emotional stimuli
Open and thoughtful to suggestion and advice	Defensive, dismissive or too gullible
Can delay gratification in the expectation of future rewards	Respond to immediate rewards or revert to stress-relieving behaviours
Can regulate emotions Can cope with and express emotions	Lack emotional regulation ability Withdraw and/or lash out
Can empathise with others Can see thing from others' point of view	Self-centred and egoistic Not in tune with others' feelings
Can openly protest if treated unfairly Do not internalise hurt, guilt, fear, anger Use respectful, fair and cooperative methods	View others' motives as malevolent Internalise hurt, guilt and anger Utilise over/covert coercive methods

*Information drawn from Bowlby (1979/1988), Holmes (1993) and Ladd et al. (2006)*

The increasing need for early childhood support programs is driven by an awareness of a need to facilitate social inclusion, and an acceptance of emotionally-driven antisocial effects relating to children's early attachment experiences (Scott, 2012; Ladd et al., 2006). These services have become necessary, Scott (2012) suggests, because it is now known that a secure attachment relationship between parents and their children assists in preventing antisocial behaviours emerging and improves children's educational and future wellbeing outcomes.

He notes that the move away from the learning (cognitive) model has occurred, because it can no longer be assumed that behaviours are simply learned and, thus, can be easily unlearned. Current information is now available on the biological effects of parenting practices, which show the profound impacts on the child's future physical, psychological and social behavioural wellbeing (Scott, 2012). For example, biological findings show that one of the main predictors, in determining whether early parent-child programs will be effective, is the young child's ability to read emotional cues. This ability is acquired in the very first months of life and it is, therefore, crucial to implement strategies which address this early stage and assist parents with bonding practices so as to improve their children's emotional wellbeing (Bowlby, 1951).

Contemporary early childhood strategies depend on the continuous participation of parents with their very young children, in early support programs. Consequently, the main issue is in trying to motivate the parents, who have bonding difficulties, to continue attending attachment-assisting programs with their children (Scott, 2012). If parents' tendency to relapse from attending can be addressed, their children's attachment behaviours can be enhanced. Secure attachments can "have lasting effects on children's bodies and the functioning of their brains, as well as on their emotions and behaviour" (Scott, 2012, p. 305).

The need to enhance parent-child bonding is now accepted, because recent biological findings are showing the presence of C-reactive protein in infants, indicating a stress response to parental anxiety. Evidence of the biological impact of inappropriate parenting practices on the child's psychosocial wellbeing is now substantiated in results of epigenetics studies showing that, rather than behavioural traits being inherited, the expression of genes is significantly facilitated by parenting practices (Scott, 2012). Nevertheless, although biological and genetic research now substantiates Bowlby's (1973, 1982) observational-based findings and gives credence to his quest to espouse the effects of attachment experiences on a child's future social wellbeing, his theory continues to be the subject of debate and refutation. Schneider et al. (2001), for instance, disagree that parental experience is the only factor



contributing to social competence and inclusion. Greenberg et al. (1990) also suggest that experiences in infancy are no less damaging than any other lifetime events. These ideas support the ecological notion (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) that equally significant sets of multiple attachments and transitions have an impact on social learning. These varying views may explain why the issue of attachment, as the pathway to social inclusion, is fraught with obstacles, because of the divergent ontological foundations used to conceptualise the process.

### 3.3 DEBATES ON ATTACHMENT THEORY

The idea that socially inclusive habits evolve from infancy does not align with developmental explanations of wellbeing (Greenberg et al., 1990). In keeping with the developmentalist notion, that early childhood experiences, alone, do not have a major impact on future socio-emotional wellbeing, Greenberg et al. (1990) subscribe to the view that early experiences do not cause any more damage than do any later events. Overall, they do acknowledge that attachment security relates to protection in terms of proximity but do not link attachment processes specifically to the pre-verbal emotional stage in infancy. They prefer the idea that attachments continuously develop and change over the life-span.

A downplaying of the primacy of the attachment process is also evident in Stenseng et al.'s (2014) writings. While acknowledging that children's self-regulation is shaped by experiences and peer relationships, they expect that positive early childhood environments and inclusive practices, even in the post-infancy stage, can reduce self-regulation problems from developing. Stenseng et al. (2014) also claim that the ability to self-regulate appears to remain constant from the age of four to six years.

Crittenden (2005) argues that these assumptions neglect to recognise the way social problems begin to manifest in infancy that is, a cognitive awareness, of a social need to self-regulate, develops much earlier in life. By the age of three months a child, who experiences unpredictable responses from their primary caregiver, can internalise negative affect. This very early-acquired negative affect impacts on the child's ability to inhibit an emotional reaction to social relations encountered thereafter. From this very early age, ensuing negative social dispositions will continue to reinforce how peers relate to the child (later adult), because of the reciprocal nature of emotional responses (Crittenden, 2005). Studies conducted in the mid-twentieth century were able to document the way social skills and "ways of being" present at an early age and showed how emotional feelings impinge on future social relationship abilities. In the 1950s, John Bowlby used an ethological approach

to explain the significance of early attachment security, and this theory was explored by means of long term observations of parent-child interactions and the behaviours of children being cared for in institutions. The impending criticisms of his theory have been rebuked by Ainsworth et al. (1962) who suggest that attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1982) has been mostly misinterpreted.

Chapters in Ainsworth et al. (1962) describe early criticisms of attachment theory, such as those made by anthropologist Margaret Mead. Mead studied primitive societies but, upon finding no comparable scenarios to the European practice of institutional care, concluded that cultural influences must be the major determinants of behaviour. A critique, by Andry (in Ainsworth et al., 1962), suggested that the attachment concept is too dependent on certain opinions, which do not allow for the complexities derived for other variables, such as father and sibling relationships or genetic attribution. His claims, however related to cross-sectional analyses without the longitudinal evidence necessary to expose the life-long effects of early attachment experiences.

The point Bowlby makes, however, is for recognition of the emotionally intense and enduring nature of affectional bonds, the disruption of which have life-long repercussions (Green & Scholes, 2004). The preface of *Deprivation of Maternal Care: A Reassessment of its Effects* (Ainsworth et al., 1962) explains that criticisms of Bowlby's attachment theory are often over-simplified, distorted and misinterpreted. Subsequently, although he did bring world-wide attention and reform to inhumane institutional practices, especially within hospital regimes, Bowlby's major claim, that the primary caregiver needs to be available and responsive to their very young child, was opposed and actually met with hostility (Green & Scholes, 2004).

This scenario seems to have arisen during the 1960s and 70s, during which time attachment theory coincided with a strong social movement of women striving for independence (Green & Scholes, 2004). Some feminist writers admitted they were ill-informed and had misunderstood Bowlby's writings (Green & Scholes, 2004). Nevertheless, new ideas, popularising the importance of economic and gender equality in western cultures, became the dominating force. In Australia, Wearing's book *The Ideology of Motherhood* (1984) names Bowlby as one of the male capitalist researchers scheming to keep women out of the workforce, by suggesting that children suffer from a lack of their mother's presence. A subsequent study, conducted by Richards (1985), however, noted flaws in Wearing's study of

suburban parents. Her study found that new ideas of gender equality, in the 1970s, caused many mothers to feel pressured to conform and resist any thoughts to the contrary.

Despite Richards' (1985) findings, it seems that Wearing's (1984) ideas persist with feminist critique often maintaining that attachment theory pathologises mothers by keeping them out of the workforce and failing to account for socio-economic inequality factors (Duschinsky et al., 2015). Consequently, Bowlby's (1973, 1982) attachment theory is perceived as a response to conservative, capitalist, economically-driven ideologies, because it suggests that the child's self-sufficiency relates to a natural family processes rather than health, social or political resources.

The continuing critique of Bowlby's theory (1973, 1982) is evident in Cleary's (1999) writings which suggest that attachment theory presupposes positivist assumptions in its universal applicability, by attributing culturally and politically prescribed misery to an individual's pathology. Cleary (1999) berates Bowlby as naïve and "philosophically anachronistic" for adhering to a thanatopsis (death-wish) explanation of people's reactions to loss, and for ignoring cultural influences. She suggests that Bowlby is confused by his own experiences of childhood grief, making him focus on the survivors' reaction to loss and omit the influences of cultural rituals and social practices.

Debates on attachment theory also involve disputing the idea that the attachment process is universal and species-specific. Duschinsky et al. (2015) negate the universality of the attachment process idea and suggest it merely supports conservative political ideas which promote individualism, naturism and capitalism. They further suggest that attachment theory fails to consider the social, political and resource needs of the caregiver. Gaskins' (2013) edition in Quinn and Mageo's (2013) book, *Attachment reconsidered: cultural perspective on a Western Theory*, states that to apply attachment theory across all cultures hints of ethnocentricity, because it espouses only middle class western values. Attachment theory is described as folk theory for failing to differentiate between single and multi-mothering.

Following this notion, Ralph (2015), a forensic scientist, expresses concern that parenting issues, for Aboriginal families in Australia, are assessed using the attachment-based western notion of parent-child relationships. He suggests that this type of assessment hints of racism, because it omits Aboriginal cultural practices where children may have multiple attachment figures. Lohar et al. (2014) concur and suggest that it is the spirituality, inherent in Aboriginal culture, which contributes to their healing. Rather than alluding to the

attachment processes, they argue that the Aboriginal kinship system enhances children's sense of identity by providing support for children, families and communities.

Notwithstanding the issue of culturally-differing parenting arrangements, the Boomerangs Parenting Program has been implemented in many areas to address Aboriginal suffering, according to the Agency for Clinical Innovation (ACI) website (2009). Present-day Aboriginal suffering is described, by the ACI, as related to historical dispossession and loss of family, leaving many people with high rates of physical and mental health problems. Despite the suggestions of Lohar et al. (2014) and Ralph (2015), the Boomerangs project has been instigated based on evidence of adverse experiences, in their early years, having laid the foundation for intergenerational cycles of abuse for Aboriginal people (ACI website, 2009).

This thesis acknowledges that some cultures have differing types of support networks for early childhood care. Ultimately, however, the primary attachment figure is still predominantly the child's mother (van IJzendoorn, 1993). This thesis highlights that, despite various culturally-based early childhood practices, the attachment process is most likely universal, because emotional development, in the pre-verbal stage of infancy, relates to survival needs of protection and proximity (Bowlby, 1969). Neuroscientist, Joseph LeDoux (2012) explains that the species-specific innate function of emotions is survival. So, while different cultures may have various survival needs, experience-dependent emotional associations, which activate neural circuits in response to trigger stimuli, are established in all humans during early development. Interestingly, as Bowlby (1969) shows, bonding is a two-way process and, therefore, mothers also need to bond with their infants.

Misunderstandings of the actual attachment process also seem to include the timing factor; that is, the crucial age at which attachment security must be achieved. For example, Watson and Tully (2008) suggest that the primary attachment develops between the ages of six to eighteen months. The age is much earlier, according to Crittenden (2005) who explains that the impact of the initial parenting experience occurs before three months of age, at which stage the brain has already matured enough for the infant to inhibit expressions of negative affect. Other misunderstandings relate to western political orientations.

The claim that Bowlby adheres to the radical individualism of western cultures (Cleary, 1999), for example, is in direct contrast to Green and Scholes' (2004) suggestion that attachment theory is the antithesis of western hyper-individualism. Cleary's (1999) interpretation is an example of how western cultural ideas have influenced values relating to

how we live with others in society, which Green and Scholes (2004) suggest is the result of the move toward a promotion of extreme independence; the idea of dependence having become equated with weakness. These conflicting ideas may create challenges, for policy approaches and contemporary ECEC understandings of social inclusion, in ensuring they are not operating in opposition to the goal of enhancing societal inclusion and wellbeing.

The contemporary understanding is in response to a need for accessible, high quality ECEC programs to ensure gender equality and increased workplace participation (Education Department, Victoria, 2009), as well as to strengthen social inclusion for both parents and children. The importance of high quality ECEC programs is also stated as recognition of the rapid cognitive growth taking place in the child's very early years. Subsequently, contemporary research and training now cover attachment issues to provide information in ensuring children build secure relationships in the early years (Harrison, 2003). It seems that the importance of cognitive development is recognised, as is the need to prioritise attachment security as an adjunct to social inclusion. Similarly, there is a parallel need to ensure gender equality and increased workforce participation.

### *3.3.1 Attachment and Culturally-defined Social Policy*

This thesis proposes that the life-long suffering which can result from inappropriate early bonding experiences may need more attention. For this reason, policy makers and parents may need more understanding of the effects of the attachment process in order to prevent generational social dysfunction (Green & Scholes, 2004). Parenting, institutional, cultural and political practices all need to operate with knowledge of the conditions needed for a child to acquire a secure attachment. This knowledge also needs to extend to practitioners and teachers and requires their insight and understanding of how they bring their own behavioural patterns into the educational/care setting (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). These patterns need to be understood as a reflection of the feelings, expectations and motivational goals associated with one's own attachment style. For example, teachers and practitioners need to realise that if they display a dismissive, avoidant style, they may distance themselves emotionally and appear less supportive towards children and parents. Teachers and practitioners may, therefore, need a degree of self-awareness, of their own attachment style, if they are to really comprehend the impact of other people's attachment experience (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). In other words, teachers/practitioners need to be in tune with their own IWM in terms of their responses to, and from, children and parents (Riley, 2011).

In endeavouring to understand issues surrounding the emotional foundation of social inclusion, this thesis strives to show the impact of attachment-based influences on social learning; that is, the impact on peer relationship success and ultimately on social inclusion status. Bowlby (1973, 1979, 1982) suggests that the process of attachment is a biological survival mechanism. If this mechanism is disrupted, or non-existent, it elicits a spectrum of repercussions, all relating to a person's inability to secure and maintain meaningful relationships, crucial for psychosocial wellbeing and social inclusion.

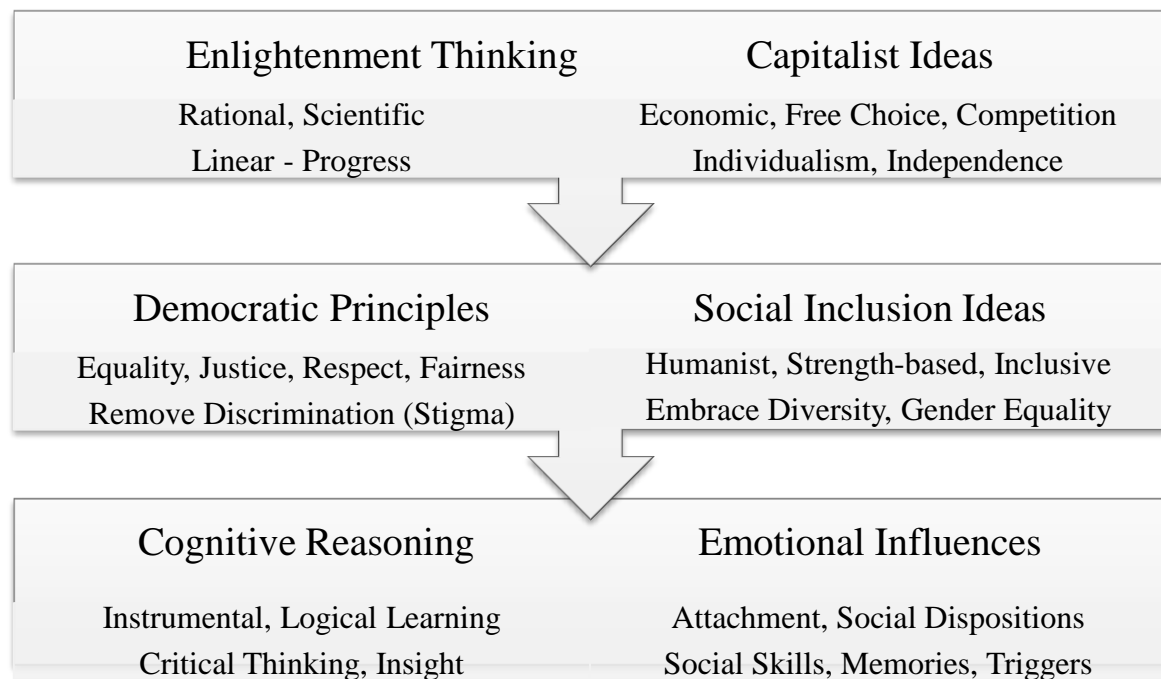
The challenge for social policy, Green and Scholes (2004) suggest, is that a conflict may arise between an acknowledgement of the optimum practices needed for a child's secure attachment and contemporary cultural beliefs and institutional approaches, especially in education. The clash of priorities, in acknowledging the attachment-related pathway to emotional wellbeing, but simultaneously focussing on a culture of competitive capitalism, may lead to a choice of economically-based short term strategies (Green & Scholes, 2004). Western capitalist culture may actually further exacerbate inequalities by diminishing the health and welfare capabilities for those who lack the requisite social skills.

Conversely, by placing more importance on early attachments experiences, the emotionally-based influences driving social inclusion can be highlighted. A focus on instrumental and value rational (Weber, 1919/1956/1968) explanations of economic rationalism within the principles of democracy can minimise the impact of affectual, emotionally-based socially-oriented forces (Green & Scholes, 2004). Prevailing cultural practices imbedded in capitalist societies, like Australia, seem to be becoming hyper-individualist and competitive and this trend may lead to unintended consequences, especially for the less privileged (Green & Scholes, 2004; Offer, 2006; Kasser et al., 2007).

These are complex issues and made even more confusing by multiple interpretations of terms and concepts. For example, the term neo-liberalism, meaning a reliance on market processes, is not the same as conservatism, as Levin and Greenwood (2011) explain. Consequently, Wearing's (1984) and Duschinsky et al.'s (2015) suggestions, that attachment theory supports conservatism, neo-liberalism and capitalism, are somewhat confusing. Their misconceptions seem to derive from the notion that attachment theory appears to support traditional values (conservatism). To equate these values with capitalism and individualism seems incongruous, nonetheless, because attachment theory is the antithesis of western individualism and capitalism (Green & Scholes, 2004; Offer, 2006; Kasser et al., 2007).

Capitalist values seem to operate in opposition to either valuing committed relationships or placing importance on ensuring children experience early, secure bonding, and achieve social competence and inclusion (Green & Scholes, 2004; Offer, 2006; Kasser et al., 2007). The following diagram explains how democratic principles and capitalist ideas may divert social strategies from the emotional aspects of social inclusion/exclusion.

**Figure 2: Democracy, Capitalism and Social Strategies**



## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the theoretical framework has been outlined as referring predominately to theories on emotions (Bowlby, 1988; TenHouten, 2007); that is the notion of being accepted or rejected socially has been examined in relation to the concept of social inclusion. This theoretical approach has been taken to explore how contemporary ECEC approaches are fostering socially inclusive behaviours, conducive to socio-economic success and psychosocial wellbeing. This chapter has emphasised the emotional aspect of feeling socially included as being related to one's early attachment experience (Bowlby, 1988). An important issue, highlighted in this chapter, is the survival value in attaining a secure attachment, without which low levels of social trust portend a non-social egocentric pathway (Bowlby, 1988; TenHouten, 2007). This chapter has described that a major repercussion of an insecure attachment experience is the role-reversing behaviours evident in children who may feel

unprotected in the presence of a fearful parent (Crittenden, 2005). The main issue, explained in this chapter, is that early experiences of social interaction difficulties can manifest later in life during times of stress or change; that is, transitions can trigger anxiety and result in externalising or internalising social behaviours (Bowlby, 1973, 1982).

The theories, described in this chapter, explain how an early-acquired negative affect (appraisal) of others emerges and can lead to compulsive self-reliance and high risks of social isolation (Crittenden, 2005). Paradoxically, although the desire to be connected is a basic human need, the urge to withdraw socially is directly related to a need to avoid the fear of rejection in this pursuit (Bowlby, 1988). The complexity of human social behaviour has been highlighted in terms of differing views as to the primacy of one or multiple attachments over the life-span. Although parent-child interactions and self-regulation/control are now a focus of ECEC services (Whalley, 2007), this chapter has explained that, in following ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974), practitioners are now often relied upon to assist children in gaining these skills (Gordon & Browne, 2011).

In this chapter, it has been noted that critiques of the attachment process (Duschinsky et al., 2015; Gaskins, 2013; Cleary, 1999) persist, despite biological evidence showing the impact of a lack of early secure bonding on the child's future psychosocial wellbeing (Scott, 2012). These critiques involve an ontological argument around the proposition that attachment theory supports a Liberal, conservative aim of preventing the primary caregiver (the mother) from accessing social, economic and political resources (Duschinsky et al., 2015).

As this chapter has shown, the emotional aspects of social inclusion relate to an early social experience being pivotal in ensuring psychosocial wellbeing for individuals, and to ensure overall societal cohesion. As Bowlby (1988) proclaims, the society in which we live is merely a reflection of the care afforded to the children in that society. From this standpoint, it would seem prudent to focus on understanding how to ensure that children's emotional wellbeing can be appropriately prioritised. The emergence of ECEC services, such as Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centres (CFCs), is testament to the efforts being made to address these early childhood needs. The following chapter describes the methodological approach, used in this research, to explore how the idea of social inclusion is understood in ECEC approaches. This chapter also examines the emotional aspects of social inclusion by taking into account the perceptions and observations of practitioners and parents involved in these programs.



## CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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This chapter explains the research methodology, rationale and design for this study. The emotional bases of social behaviour is investigated by linking the information, based on parent and practitioner accounts, with theories to explore understandings of social inclusion in contemporary ECEC approaches. This methodological approach is taken to examine the proposition that social behaviour may not always be a cognitive decision, calculated in an expectation of attaining strictly economic and/or socially rational goals. For this thesis, the theoretical framework explains how emotions can drive behaviours and this chapter sets out the methodology in examining how this may occur.

The methodological approach, therefore, seeks the most effective means to gauge the influence of emotions on social action. After considering the various methods used in educational enquiry, the most authentic means of understanding social behaviours seems to be to simply talk to the people involved in the study environment (Bourdieu, 1990a). To this end, this research examines social behaviours by interviewing practitioners and parents involved in LiL and CFC programs. Parents who regularly participate in these ECEC programs are invited to talk about their experiences, whereas practitioners and teachers are asked about their role in facilitating social inclusion.

The research rationale is to determine the best way to attain information on a possible connection between the emotional basis of social skill development and feelings of social inclusion/exclusion. This connection is explored by analysing information gained from interviewing sixteen practitioners and eight parents involved in LiL and CFC programs. These programs have been set up in specific low SES areas, in Tasmania, Australia, with the aim of reducing disadvantage by promoting social inclusion.

A shift from positivist evidence-based enquiry is noteworthy and inherent in the rationale for taking a critical realist, post-positivist position, for this research. Nevertheless, there are also challenges in conducting qualitative educational research and limitations in the sociological study of emotional influences driving social action. For this reason, the practicalities of conducting a study of twenty four practitioners and parents, involved in LiL and CFC programs, are also described in this chapter. The methodological approach, for this study, has been chosen as the best way to acquire rich information to address the research question (Mason, 2002), which is: “What are contemporary understandings of social

inclusion in ECEC approaches in Tasmania?” From this main question, three sub-questions emerge, which are:

1. Can Bourdieuan and Bowlbian theories assist in promoting more understanding of the reality of social inclusion/exclusion and if so, how?
2. What insights can be gained, from practitioners and parents, concerning whether, and when, social behaviour is a cognitive choice or predominantly an emotional inclination?
3. Can better understandings of socially-acquired dispositions, in the context of historical and cultural factors, assist ECEC approaches in facilitating enhanced social inclusion outcomes for families?

Leading into the research design, this chapter initially outlines the theoretical assumptions and philosophical stance (ways of knowing) underlying the choice of qualitative methodology taken for this research. Other methods, used in educational enquiry, are briefly mentioned to further explain the choice to directly interview practitioners and parents for the study. There are a number of ways to design a research study and this chapter explains why quantitative methods, particularly experimental design, are unsuitable for studying socio-emotional behaviours and the concept of social inclusion.

This explanation is needed because there is an expectation, in education and social policy, that “hard” science can provide more certainty and rigor (Hartas, 2009). The choice to interview practitioners and parents has been taken, for his research thesis, rather than pursuing quantitative methods to empirically measure intangible concepts like social inclusion and emotions. As Hartas (2009) suggests, efforts to apply the study of natural science to human behaviour can appear somewhat hypocritical. Given that science can be misused, in the pursuit of easily codified “hard” evidence, this research attempts to demonstrate how qualitative methods can be a more authentic way to examine the emotional side of social inclusion.

#### 4.1 WHY QUALITATIVE NOT QUANTITATIVE

An insistence on evidence-based experimentalism in research often ignores the fact that disciplines differ in what can be easily measured (Erickson, 2011). The unsuitability of applying quantitative study to human behaviour, particularly using experimental design, is considered worthy of a brief discussion. This research seeks to highlight the reasons why

quantitative methods are unable to unravel the intricacies of emotionally-based social motivations. Ecologically-based educational research, for example, often involves systematically analysing data by means of experimental design (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). Heuristic goals frame ecological theory, which advocates the scientific method as a way to avoid experimenter bias, familiarity and the risk of phenomena going unnoticed (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). Bourdieu (1990b) argues that phenomena are more likely to be omitted in empirical studies, because of the focus on gaining scientific statistical regularities, which creates a situation where un-heard-of variables can go unnoticed.

Nevertheless, Bronfenbrenner (1974) advocates a scientific study of learning and claims that the only way to study behavioural processes is by introducing change within experimental design. Similarly influential in educational research is the scientific theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978), which relies on the psychology of cognitive development in assuming that thought is transformed into speech (Newman & Holzman, 2014). Vygotsky's (1978) theory has been critiqued, however, because it emphasises language, as an expression of thinking (cognitions), and links social and cognitive issues without recognising emotional influences (Berk, 2013).

Quantitative methods are noted for resolutely pursuing neutrality and objectivity by using experimental design to ascertain ways to improve performance in early childhood educational settings (Erickson, 2110). Ultimately, research neutrality and objectivity are elusive, because it is the investigator who starts the game (Bourdieu, 1999). Even where research is based on perceived common sense notions and presumed neutrality, empirical survey and interview questions are still based on someone's decision of what to include and/or omit (Bourdieu, 1999).

Another challenge for quantitative study is that it can omit important observed patterns of behaviour if they appear too difficult to measure empirically. Greenberg et al.'s (1990) study of attachment in the pre-school years, for instance, ignores some observed social behaviours, simply because they seem immeasurable.

Following a developmentalist paradigm, Greenberg et al. (1990) prefer methods which can produce hard evidence based on measurable indices. In seeking hard evidence, through experimental design, the psychological tradition creates challenges, such as those evident in Greenberg et al. (1990) studies. By ignoring observed behaviours, they are unable to examine one of the most fundamental predictors of attachment problems; namely role-reversal behaviours. Other challenges, in trying to analyse human social behaviour

quantitatively, relate to the arbitrariness in discerning which variables to examine, and at which time in the life cycle (Bourdieu, 1999). Schuh and Barab (2007) suggest that the behaviourist view, upheld by psychology and education, is primarily monist and materialist, enabling emotions to be explained as purely functions of the brain.

TenHouten (2007) also states that empirical studies may not capture a full understanding of the complexity of human emotions, which he suggests requires a multi-disciplinary approach to encompass biological, psychological and sociological aspects. The discipline of biology, for example, reveals that an unpredictable, unstable early attachment experience triggers elevated levels of stress hormones, such as cortisol, which facilitate hyper-vigilance and high levels of arousal in response to certain social situations.

Consequently, this thesis attempts to overcome the challenges in studying human behaviour, especially in education, by employing qualitative research methods (Hartas, 2009). Qualitative research is able to establish the situation, as it is, through interactive research, incorporating the views of both educators and learners (Hartas, 2009). Given the difficulties in assessing and measuring social behaviours, qualitative methods can be more valuable in studying the emotional side of human action.

Empiricists, however, seek tangible evidence and this usually involves looking at superficial issues rather than the deeper, more complex, often invisible aspects of behaviour (Bourdieu, 1990a). Despite the ongoing debates as to the validity of “hard” versus “soft” science (Hartas, 2009), this research has been undertaken in the belief that qualitative methods are the more authentic means of capturing a deeper understanding of the emotional basis of social behaviours.

In support of the critical realist approach, this thesis emphasises a need to re-think the nature of knowledge instead of relying on evidence-based, social engineering approaches (Hartas, 2009). Rather than pursuing easy-fix solutions, the focus of this research is placed on examining the issues as they are now. In this pursuit, it is acknowledged that there is a need to avoid the influence of political ideologies, such as the new managerial culture, which promotes positivist inquiry as efficient and authoritative (Hartas, 2009). While experimental design may provide relevant information for examining issues pertaining to educational curriculum or program content, qualitative methods appear to be more beneficial in examining behavioural motivations, emotions, functions, phenomena and interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## 4.2 APPROACH

The research methodology, for this study, seeks the optimum means of gaining knowledge on the way social inclusion is understood in contemporary ECEC approaches and how emotions and/or cognitions influence decisions to participate in LiL and CFC programs. Information on social inclinations is considered particularly relevant, given that participation in these programs is promoted as a way to reduce disadvantage by enhancing social inclusion, specifically for families living in low SES environments (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009).

Qualitative research methodology has been chosen for this study as the most appropriate way to document parents' and practitioners' personal accounts, based on their involvement in LiL and CFC programs.

This information, with reference to underlying philosophical and theoretical frameworks, is sought for the purpose of gaining understanding on the emotional influences motivating social behaviours. These understandings are important because, although theory and research are inseparable, the relationship between the two can elicit varied interpretations (Hartas, 2009).

### *4.2.1 Philosophical View of the Mind and Body*

Endeavouring to explain the intricacies of social behaviour requires exposing the philosophical world-view which, for this thesis, involves a belief in the immeasurable, but observable, nature of emotional influences driving social behaviours. In recent times, beliefs around mind/body dualism have moved away from the learning concept of the body as the hardware, and the reprogrammable mind as the software of behaviour (Scott, 2012). This move has occurred, because contemporary findings in biology are now able to show connections between chemical changes and the effects on children's brains, bodies, psychology and behaviour. Given the biological impacts on behaviours, a more apt analogy would be, perhaps, to call the mind/psyche the hardware, because it involves the primary emotions, which trigger chemical changes. From this premise, the body/brain may be more comparable to the software, where cognitions, perceptions and social behaviours derive from emotionally imprinted messages.

Consequently, the philosophical assumption underlying this research is that the mind and brain, although inextricably connected, are not one and the same; the mind being emotional as opposed to the physicality of the brain (Schuh & Barab, 2007). The reason this position is taken is in the belief that the mind is concerned with memory of experiences from

where perceptions of reality evolve. It is, because reality is assumed separate from the perceptions within the mind, that it is beholden on the sociologist to examine how individuals' perceptions of events and responses to their environment, relate to observed patterns of behaviour (Schuh & Barab, 2007).

This research, therefore, seeks to unravel social behaviours in the belief that the mind is a separate, albeit collaborative, entity from the brain and that memories and emotions are intangible and thus empirically immeasurable. Deriving from Cartesian philosophy, the idea of dualism is that the mind is considered distinct from the body, the body being tangible and measurable whereas the mind is symbolic, subjective and perceptive (Schuh & Barab, 2007). The nature of emotions is that they are intangible and difficult to study and require taking various epistemological and philosophical theories into account (TenHouten, 2007).

With this philosophy in mind, this thesis draws on theories of emotions in the context of various disciplinary ideas and contemporary social inclusion strategies. Theories, in line with historical, cultural and political contexts, are used to frame the practitioner interview responses and parent accounts to gain information on contemporary understandings of social inclusion in ECEC approaches. Rather than subscribing to a rational actor, post-Enlightenment philosophy, however, this research supports Bourdieu's (1990a) call for a philosophy to explain what is happening now. The interviews with LiL and CFC practitioners and parents are sought to reveal their everyday experiences, viewpoints and observations.

#### *4.2.2 Connecting Theory and Observations*

Inherent in this research is an acceptance that purely deductive or inductive approaches do not exist, because the seeking of knowledge often involves a combination of examining everyday accounts, interpreting meanings, utilising social science data and reflecting on one's own experience (Mason, 2002). While the hypothetical-deductive approach moves from a theoretical generalisation to a particular action, grounded theory usually involves allowing the data to reveal the theory. Even grounded theory is not purely inductive as it was initially instigated to overcome the problem of theory testing in quantitative research (Atkinson et al., 2003).

Consequently, the idea behind this research is that neither theory testing nor inductive analysis is enough to explain new patterns of behaviours in a changing world. Accordingly, abductive reasoning is adopted as a more practical way of connecting the theories with parent

and practitioner perspectives. The combination of deductive and inductive theorising, in this research, includes a general proposal that a link may exist between early attachment-related, emotionally-based social skills and the acquiring of social dispositions/inclinations. This presumed link is examined in conjunction with relevant theories and an inductive analysis of common themes emerging from the practitioner interviews and parent accounts.

Bowlby's (1973,1982) attachment theory is prominent in the theoretical framework which examines the influences motivating social behaviours. Theories explaining the emotional foundation of an individual's social behaviour can add meaning to Bourdieu's (1984) suggestion that certain social dispositions may elicit societal disadvantage. The purpose of seeking this information is to assist social policy and ECEC approaches to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the way teacher/practitioner-parents/children and primarily parent-children interactions, impact on social inclusion.

#### 4.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

Various qualitative methods are utilised to produce and represent evidence on group behaviours (Erickson, 2011). Information for qualitative research can be sought by various means, such as case studies, interviews, observational and historical texts, all aimed at unravelling and examining routine and/or problematic moments in time. A feature of qualitative methods, according to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), is the focus on hermeneutic methods where information is sought by the interpretation of texts; this type of enquiry is often critiqued as being observer-dependent and possibly unreliable.

While this research study is based on interpretation of the spoken word in conjunction with the theoretical framework, the expectation is that these qualitative interviews can provide a rich source of information on the emotional bases of social behaviours. Other challenges for qualitative study are in discerning the real power imbalances and ensuring authentic representation by not concentrating solely on the pursuit of democracy and social justice (Erickson, 2011).

##### *4.3.1 Power Imbalances and Broad Assumptions*

In education, research-practitioner collaborative methods are often employed as a way to reduce the risk of unequal power relations, inherent in qualitative research (Somekh, 2006). Although collaborative, democratic research seeks to solve real-life problems, using practitioners' contextual knowledge and direct observations (Somekh, 2002), research

questions are usually formulated by people within the education system (Delamont & Jones, 2012). Collaborative methods aim to overcome the issue of unequal power relationships and encourage more reflective teachers but with an expectation that practitioners will become “more willing data collectors” (Noffke, 2002, p. 18).

While cognisant of the challenge in being able to truly represent the studied group in an objective manner, an accurate representation might not be assured just because the researcher is an “insider” from the same race/class/gender as those being observed (Mason, 2002). The reason difficulties arise is because of the tendency of the “insider” to overlook familiar phenomena. Issues of practice, in critical education research, can also be overlooked if the focus is to emancipate perceived disadvantaged groups (Hattam & Smyth, 2014). Consequently, the overuse of terms, such as “disadvantaged”, can suppose that all people in certain environments are somehow powerless upon being trapped in undesirable locations.

For this reason, Bourdieu’s *habitus* theory is sometimes mistakenly critiqued as patronisingly assigning deficit descriptions to the poor. Hattam and Smyth (2014) contend, for example, that the “disadvantaged postcode” perspective in education research, simply serves to reinforce stereotypes rather than address inequality. They critique Bourdieu’s (1984) theory as being somewhat interactionist and suggest it assumes and defines acceptable and/or rule-breaking social behaviour. As Becker (1974) suggests, rule-breaking behaviour is behaviour which is labelled by moral entrepreneurs as deviant and in need of remediation.

This research accepts that emancipatory-type research can be patronising if it presumes that all members of certain groups are disadvantaged and in need of rescuing. It is argued, however, that Hattam and Smyth’s (2014) critique cannot be applied to the idea of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). *Habitus* theory merely promotes the notion that the dominant culture, often propagated within education and academic institutions, can reproduce inequalities for those perceived as not possessing the requisite social skills/responses.

Rather than a specific defined group issue, social exclusion is, therefore, a much broader concept and cannot be directly attributable to economic, educational or locational disadvantage (Vinson, 2009). The choice of participants from low SES locations, for this research, seeks to dispel the idea that all people, in certain areas, are automatically disadvantaged socially.

The challenge is try to avoid broad assumptions about certain groups without having to immerse into the research subject’s everyday life. As Bourdieu notes, the “distinction between sociology and ethnology prevents the ethnologist from submitting his own



experience to the analysis that he applies to his object” (1990a, p. 66). The sociologist, the outsider, endeavours to be objective, while the ethnologist, the insider, seeks the subjective lived experience. The latter, however, may still not avoid interpreting meanings of behaviour based on their own lived experience (Bourdieu, 1990a).

In education, critical theory claims a commitment to social justice, equality and non-discrimination in the assumption that social science is embedded in ideologies of value, power, sexism, racism and domination (Erickson, 2011). For example, supporting the social justice aim, implicit in critical theory, O’Leary (2014) stresses the need for research to be sensitive to gender, race and power relations. She warns that omitting these factors can produce a self-centric analysis.

The notion that all members of certain groups automatically suffer injustices, however, assumes that specific groups are real entities (Bourdieu, 1990a). These types of assumptions omit that, in reality, people exist in their own social sphere and, for this reason their behaviour and self-perception are the main issues needing to be more fully understood. For this research, the focus is to understand social behaviours rather than assume that all members of certain groups are disadvantaged.

This research neither subscribes to a deficit theory, in blaming people for their supposed failures, nor does it suppose that all members of certain groups are in need emancipation. In contrast to critical theory, critical realism is relied upon as a more helpful way for this research to explain the complex aspects of inequalities. One of the complexities, for example, is exemplified in the way that anyone from any group can suffer discrimination if their social dispositions are perceived as inappropriate and deficient by the dominant group (Bourdieu, 1984).

In understanding this idea more fully, it is hoped that policy, informing ECEC approaches, may be in a better position to avert further subjugation of those who suffer real disadvantage, not because of their class, race, gender or postcode *per se*, but because of their social skill inelegance. As this research focuses on analysing people’s emotionally-based social tendencies, it is mainly concerned with seeking information on the way a person’s social dispositions affect their social inclusion and inclination to participate in early childhood education and family support programs.

This research thesis adheres to the idea that reality cannot be changed simply by changing language or theory (Bourdieu, 2000). Consequently, even though gender, disability, ethnicity and class issues may be socially constructed, it does not follow that any

problems can be solved simply by deconstructing these social artefacts (Bourdieu, 2000). It is, therefore, accepted that families, for whom ECEC programs are implemented, may be composed of differing groups. Ultimately, this research does not assume that any particular group status automatically denotes disadvantage or domination. The aim is simply to examine how feelings of social exclusion may relate to emotionally-based social dispositions.

#### 4.4 EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology explains the thinking, which frames a determination to find the best way to generate knowledge regarding the phenomena of certain observed social behaviours (Mason, 2002). This study takes a post-positivist stance, in gaining information on patterns of behaviour, while at the same time supporting the critical realist idea that social action can be observed but is mostly outside the realm of human consciousness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

##### *4.4.1 Critical Realism and Post-positivism*

The post-positivist, realist position favours the idea that reality exists outside the perceptions of the mind and that knowledge can be found between the word and the mind (Schuh & Barab, 2007). To explore the foundations of social inclusion, this research aligns the personal testimonies of practitioners and parents with the theoretical framework, as a way to examine how emotions can influence cognitions (perceptions).

The critical realist view, taken in the research, promotes the idea that understanding can be achieved by investigating how certain types compose their life pathways, in response to the effects of the labour market, educational system and public policy (Bourdieu, 1990a). This study follows Bourdieu's (1990a) advice as to the most effective way of getting to the heart of people's struggles. The best way to obtain information, he suggests, is to really listen to people who work in the social service sector and talk to those who reside in areas classed as disadvantaged. For this research, participants were chosen from three areas, classed as low SES, in order to gain information from the people who work and reside in these ECEC targeted locations.

Critical realism accepts the positivist notion that observable world events are mostly independent of human consciousness; an idea which is rejected by those who believe social science must commit to social justice, anti-violence and human rights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Opponents of critical realism, therefore, prefer social study to address issues of power, domination, sexism and racism.

The main challenge for qualitative research is to attain dependability in research findings so as to accurately interpret the complexities of human action through the written word (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). The post-positivist stance, taken for this research, acknowledges that the social world is complex and may not be explained by statistics alone (O’Leary, 2014). This acknowledgment is based on the idea that, although emotionally-based dispositions are difficult to measure, they may be observed as patterns of behaviours, which can be linked to theories.

From a post-positivist standpoint it is, therefore, possible to examine patterns which emerge in certain social situations (Hatch & Barclay-McLaughlin, 2006). A feature of this research is the idea that social patterns can be examined in certain settings albeit, as critical realism suggests, with an understanding that these observable events are mostly outside human consciousness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

While the positivist perspective describes reality in terms of experience, the post-positivist position is that reality can be viewed in terms of language (Hartas, 2009). Both positivists and post-positivists view social reality as anthropocentric, relating to human perception and discourse, but the post-positivist idea is that reality is socio-linguistic (Hartas, 2009). Critical realism espouses the notion that reality is independent of the mind and digresses from the post-positivist notion that reality exists only as it is stated. Instead, critical realism subscribes to the notion that life is influenced by multiple factors and acknowledges the fallibility of researchers.

This study supports the critical realist focus in seeking an in-depth understanding of patterns of behaviours. Similarly, being cognisant of the influences of social structures and cultural norms, this research draws on relevant theories to ascertain the underlying influences motivating emotionally-based social dispositions. These theories are complemented by the information gained from practitioners and parents, whose perspectives and experiences are expressed verbally.

These perspectives are crucial in striving to reflect on the contradictions arising from differences in knowledge bases, practices, cultural traditions and beliefs; all impacting on social integration (Wong et al., 2012). The concept of social inclusion, for example, is seen as a way to reduce discrimination and inequality and increase diversity (Wong & Turner, 2014) in the expectation that adherence to social inclusion principles can ensure democratic decision-making (DEEWR, 2009).

Consequently, in Australia, the concept of social inclusion denotes a social justice milieu, exemplified in the provision of quality ECEC services which promote democratic participation (Wong & Turner, 2014). Parents' democratic informed choice, however, operates alongside the policy aim for universal access to ECEC services; that is, high rates of participation are required to ensure children are prepared for mainstream school and adult life (Wong & Turner, 2014). The challenge, however, in offering equal opportunities to reduce discrimination, is also to maintain individual freedoms (Silver, 2010).

This research study examines the notion of free choice by asking questions and encouraging discussion about participation issues. These questions/discussions relate to the issue of choice in people's decisions to attend ECEC programs. The information gained from practitioners and parents is relevant to address the research question, which seeks information about contemporary understandings of social inclusion in ECEC approaches.

#### *4.4.2 Macro and Micro Perspectives*

This research places importance on explaining the impact of both macro and micro influences on social inclinations. On a societal level, explanations cite culturally prescribed social expectations (Bourdieu, 1984) and, from an individual perspective, emotional influences, derived from early attachment experience, are mentioned (Bowlby, 1988). From a macro perspective, historical, political and cultural factors represent the structural influences motivating behaviours, whereas the triggers of social responses are based on the individual's (micro) schemes of early-acquired cognitive perspectives, related to already-realised potentialities (Bourdieu, 1990b).

This mirrored effect occurs because one's sense of personal worthiness/entitlement impacts on the judgments of others (Cooley, 1902). Subsequently, this research is based on the notion that one's sense of self impacts on the expectation of others' responses, which, in turn, elicits certain reactions within all social interactions (Bourdieu, 1990b).

Despite Hattam and Smyth's (2014) assertion that *habitus* theory (Bourdieu, 1984) patronisingly ascribes fault to certain groups, this research takes a critical realist position which does not seek to emancipate perceived oppressed groups. In following a critical realist perspective, this research is undertaken in the belief that it is possible to avoid deficit explanations by seeking understanding of the broader context of social behaviour (Bourdieu, 1974).

The underlying aim of this research is predominantly to gain better understandings of social behaviour by means of face-to-face interviews and dialogue, but not to ascribe disadvantage to certain groups, solely in terms of their perceived group status (Bourdieu, 2000). The risk with educational research is that a focus on the pursuit of democratic principles, as a way to reduce inequalities and deliver social justice, can hold an assumption that all members of certain groups are considered disadvantaged (Levin & Greenwood, 2011).

## 4.5 FOCUS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

### *4.5.1 Democracy and Social Justice*

A social justice agenda is often prominent in applied research methods, which are promoted as pragmatic, democratic and more meaningful, because they purport to link theory with real practice (Levin & Greenwood, 2011). The notion that western countries, like Australia, are free and democratic is often upheld in the context of various indistinct genres (Kincheloe, 2011).

This idea is, however, queried by many postmodernist researchers who note that class distinction seems to have been subsumed by certain groups who claim to have been historically marginalised (Kincheloe, 2011). The risk is that ideologies, if derived from dominant values and beliefs, can be subtly aimed at protecting certain powerful interests (Cohen et al., 2007). Bourdieu (1984) suspects that the power of the dominant class resides in their ability to impose their existence, implicit in self-affirming assumptions of how things are, or ought to be, which frames their categorisations and representations of disadvantage (Bourdieu, 1999).

Ideological presumptions, such as the notion that education can fix society, may contribute to a loss of objectivity in research (Cohen et al., 2007). In an attempt to avoid ideological assumptions, the critical realist perspective proposes that patterns of behaviour are observable in others rather than consciously self-evident (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For the purpose of this research, the critical realist perspective appears as the most helpful way to examine the social behaviours of parents and children involved in ECEC settings. By taking a critical realist stance, the underlying influences motivating social behaviours can be explored, while taking into account the ECEC approach in facilitating social inclusion as a way to create a more equitable society (DEEWR, 2009).

In the pursuit of understanding social behaviour, this research is, therefore, not principally concerned with attempting to describe unequal power relations or emancipate assumed dominated groups for the purpose of upholding the principles of democracy (Cohen et al., 2007). This research principally seeks to ensure low levels of intervention and high ethical standards, in ascertaining contemporary understandings of social inclusion in ECEC approaches.

#### *4.5.2 Overcoming Deficit Assumptions and Bias*

In seeking to move from deficit assumptions and reproduction of inequality explanations, contemporary ideas in educational research are now taking a view that students are already equal and intelligent critical theorists in their own right (Hattam & Smyth, 2014). In an endeavour to overcome researcher bias, some take the view that students can be their own researchers and problem-solvers, believing they are capable of engaging in critical analysis (Kincheloe, 2011).

If teachers and practitioners are expected to contribute as researchers, they may need to understand their own authority and the power implications of various educational reforms. They may also need to be able to understand the minds of children and parents and be aware of the way in which motives, values and emotions impact on their behaviours (Kincheloe, 2011).

This research takes a different position by following Bourdieu's (1974) perspective, which suggests that unequal relations are created because of a person's social dispositions and acquired behaviours. This view highlights how societal structures, such as educational institutions, which hold the dominant values, can inadvertently perpetuate children's social deficiencies (Bourdieu, 1974). In other words, the basis of education:

*is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one. (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 32)*

If it is assumed that all people have certain social skills, teachers and practitioners may unknowingly impose culturally-defined social responses in the expectation that everyone has access to the same cultural capital. Bourdieu claims that the education system:

*demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture, which can only be produced by family upbringing.* (1977, p. 494).

Bourdieu (1977) explains how family upbringing creates specific social responses (verbal and non-verbal). Consequently, any behaviour, which appears unfamiliar or is considered inappropriate within the wider community, can be misinterpreted and elicit negative reactions from teachers, practitioners and other parents (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's (1990b) view is that social relations are constructed by understandings and through misunderstandings and are reflected in the way teachers/practitioners and children/parents communicate.

From a critical realist perspective, it is argued that most people are not capable of being self-critical, because they are generally unaware of the reasons behind their struggles (Bourdieu, 1999). For the purpose of this research, practitioners' observations are considered more productive than asking people, particularly children, to critically self-analyse. A critical realist view is taken in the understanding that individuals are generally unaware of their patterns of behaviour but that social trends can be observed by other people and then theoretically analysed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

## 4.6 CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH

### 4.6.1 Political Agenda

Educational research is often criticised, as Evans (2002) contends, for failing to answer questions posed by policy makers and not offering helpful advice on professional practice. Fragmentation appears to occur because education research, while addressing the many differing positions and sample groups, is not creating a solid base for practice or policy. Further problems arise because education research is often politically motivated and tends to exclude ideas that are not conducive to those involved in the research programs. Overall, a lack of rigour can occur in educational research in terms of care, expertise of procedure and lack of sound philosophical stance, because ontology and epistemology are often conflated (Evans, 2002).

The reason educational research seems to lack a strong theoretical and philosophical basis is, because it is inclined to reward researchers who have new ideas which can influence policy and reflect popular opinion (Evans, 2002). Subsequently, for this research, the way to overcome these issues is for educational research to take a more sociological approach

(Delamont & Jones, 2012). By taking a sociological approach, the focus can be placed on the primary goal for human services; that is, to alleviate stress by enhancing the relationship between people and social institutions (Monette et al., 2011).

Descriptive research and evaluations may not achieve these goals, because they are too reliant on philosophical ideas and/or speculations, which may lead to unintended consequences (Monette et al., 2011). Another critique of social research is that academics can take the position of spectator without a contextual understanding of institutions or an ability to reflect on their own narrow interests (Levin & Greenwood, 2011). This may be the reason why evidence-based research is so frequently chosen as the way to overcome issues of neutrality and objectivity.

#### *4.6.2 Evidence-based Requirements*

The assumption that early childhood services can facilitate social inclusion is based on evidence, which informs the Social Inclusion Principles for Australia (Australian Government, 2010). Evidence is obtained in the form of monitoring, evaluation of strategies and regular reporting of social inclusion outcomes and indicators (Caruana & McDonald, 2011). For example, the UK's National Social Inclusion Program (2007) strategies, to create socially inclusive behaviours, are required to be evidence-based and values driven.

An evidence-base is sought by Greenberg et al. (1990), because they argue that conclusive evidence is not to be found in observed behaviours. They state that any assessment of changes in the pre-school years needs to be measured experimentally. Ladd et al. (2006) note the ethical constraints limit research on attachment-related behaviours, such as manipulative peer abuse and victimisation in children. When examining emotionally-based behaviours, Greenberg et al. (1990) prefer to assess and measure attachment-based behaviours, in the pre-school years, using experimental methods. This method, they suggest, allows for the coding and follow-up needed to maintain reliability and validity.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu (1990a) explains that the social world is complex and, even though some patterns of behaviours appear vague and obscure, they still need examination. He adds that the evidence-based need for codification is merely a means to formalise information, impose order on social action and to minimise ambiguity. Codification, however, does not ensure accuracy, because people's dispositions (*habitus*) are only realised in relation to certain situations and environments (Bourdieu, 1990a). For this reason, it is the



sociologist's role to bring to light issues which are hidden beneath the surface (Bourdieu, 1999).

#### 4.7 OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

The research draws on sociology to examine social behaviours by acknowledging the importance of practitioners' knowledge. Ertmer and Newby (1993) believe that practitioners are in the best position to observe patterns of behaviours, in the same way a medical doctor observes certain trends in their patients. Sociological research can be useful, because contemporary educational strategies are highly reliant on instructional indices, designed to facilitate specific changes in education settings, rather than take note of behavioural patterns observed by practitioners. Instructional design, alone, may not be sufficient if it does not incorporate and link theories of human learning with appropriate prescriptive solutions (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). Conversely, sociological theory can provide a way to explain underlying problems relating to prevailing cultural patterns (Green & Scholes, 2004). Trends of individualism, rationalism and competitiveness, for example, seem to be emerging in educational institutions, especially in terms of the qualities desired in teachers/practitioners and children.

One of the challenges, in sociological research, is to avoid assuming that the group to be studied is exercising free choice rather than engaging in "un-chosen choice" (Bourdieu, 1990a). Sociological study must strive to avoid rhetorical effects by aiming to close the gap between real practices and the abstract mental world, according to Bourdieu (1990a). He notes a common flaw in sociological research; that being, it often leans towards the idea of free will rather than acknowledging that people may be impelled, or inclined, towards certain social behaviours. As a result, social behaviours need to be observed and analysed in conjunction with the person's cultural/historical experiences.

In the study of human behaviour, Bourdieu (1990b) notes that efforts to correct the structuralist model often lead to "context" explanations of variables, but that this method involves observing people presumed to be exercising free choice. Aligning with Bourdieu's (1990b) ideas, this research neither adheres to the "being of reason" notion, nor assumes people are motivated by informed calculation in the pursuit of economic rewards. As Calhoun (1999) explains, Bourdieu's caution around the subjectivist tradition is that it assumes people act in response to a calculative rational choice of all available options. But, for many, the possibilities of choice are severely limited, because their origins are unknown.

When studying social behaviours, characteristics ascribed to groups of people are often applied to individuals within the group, resulting in observed behavioural patterns being construed as causal rather than symptomatic. This research is conducted in the belief that economic and locational disadvantage cannot be attributed to, or correlated with, a person's propensity to emotional problems which are more about social skill capability than affluence (Ecclestone, 2007).

Examining social behaviours is becoming increasingly difficult and Erickson (2011) expresses concern that postmodern realist interpretive ethnographical approaches, although offering continuing innovation, are increasingly losing legitimacy. For instance, Erickson (2011) sees two problems in seeking knowledge by qualitative methods; the first being the unequal power relationships existing between the researcher and the researched and the second, the subsequent risks of asking inappropriate questions and receiving inaccurate responses. The problem, inherent in sociological enquiry, according to Bourdieu, resides in the process of:

*objectifying the objectivity that runs through the supposed site of subjectivity, such as the social categories of thought, perception and appreciation...offers the only means of contributing, if only through awareness of determinations, to the construction, otherwise abandoned to the forces of the world, of something like a subject. (1990b, p. 25)*

Issues of subjectivism and objectivism are the main divisions in social science as:

*today's sociology is full of false oppositions....they have a social foundation, but ....no scientific foundation. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 34)*

The current research concurs with Bourdieu's (1990a) suggestion that there are diverse views within the discipline of sociology, between theorists and empiricists and objectivists and subjectivists but ultimately in perceptions of what constitutes the physical versus psychological realms:

*Social science....oscillates between two apparently incompatible points of view, two apparently irreconcilable perspectives: objectivism and subjectivism...physicalism and psychologism. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 124)*

Another challenge for the study of human social behaviour is the ethical limitations.

#### 4.8 AXIOLOGY

Walter (2010) describes the term “axiology” as a theory of intrinsic and extrinsic values relating to the researcher’s values and the values of external groups or institutions. This research is mindful of the importance of self-reflexivity as a way to increase dependability, especially when combined with practitioner and parent voices so as to produce multiple interpretations and perspectives (Gergen & Gergen, 1991).

Consequently, it is openly revealed that an interest in the subject of this research thesis has been heightened upon having the opportunity to attend LiL sessions on several occasions. As described in the introduction, reflections on social behaviours have arisen from five decades lived experience of social change, personal family and social integration issues and work experience in the Education, Child Protection and Criminal Court settings. Life-time experiences and observations have piqued an interest in gaining understanding of the reasons why some people seem easily socially included while others have ongoing difficulties “fitting in”.

While accepting the critical postmodernist interpretation that cultural patterns are continuously changing under dominant power influences, as Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) suggest, this research concurs with Cohen’s (2007) view that emancipatory ideology appears somewhat utopian. Accordingly, this thesis focuses more on seeking understanding of social behaviours rather than explicitly pursuing a social justice agenda. As Bourdieu (1984) notes, the pursuit of justice may subtly contain quasi-conscious self-affirmations of *shoulds* and *oughts*, which may impose the expectations of the privileged and ignore the real social facts.

This research study is, therefore, not conducted under the presumption that all members of certain groups are necessarily suffering disadvantage and discrimination solely because of their group status, such as gender, race or geographical location. As Bourdieu (1990a) suggests, there is a need to cease identifying specific groups as an entity, because people live in their own social realm, which renders disadvantage as somewhat relative.

The thinking behind this thesis is that a person’s social world is changeable in response to differing situations and according to early acquired social dispositions, perceptions of support and ways of thinking, as Bourdieu (1990a) explains. He argues that the practice of assigning all members of certain groups as disadvantaged and/or dominated tends to romanticise that group and omit the real issue of domination, which is more related to a person’s feelings of inclusion and sense of self.

Consequently, in the pursuit of social justice, it cannot be assumed that discrimination and marginalisation are related to any defined-group status. Life experiences and reflections on discrimination, based on personal and work experiences, have formulated an interest in the topic of social deprivation as a major obstacle in being socially included. It is acknowledged, however, that subjective biases cannot be completely avoided as they usually permeate one's world-view.

#### *4.8.1 Ethical Considerations*

This research study emphasises the importance of ethical considerations. For this reason, non-participating parents were not subjected to interrogation, because of the risk of exposing vulnerable people to feeling judged about their parenting and social behaviours. Ethical considerations formed a major part of the decision to interview practitioners and talk to participating parents, only, as a means to seek information on emotions, social behaviours and contemporary understandings of social inclusion.

Mason (2002) advises that, in order to maintain integrity, qualitative research needs to avoid false generalisations, act ethically and responsibly and initiate debate about legitimate public concerns. A major value, inherent in this research, is to avoid subjugating vulnerable people by potentially placing them under scrutiny. Non-attending parents were, therefore, not included in the study. Instead, regularly-attending parents were invited to participate and talk freely about their experiences within ECEC programs.

Contemporary research places high importance on avoiding exploitation of potentially vulnerable people, who may be the subject of the study. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) describe vulnerable individuals as those who are unable to make personal life choices or decisions and may be at risk of suffering real or potential harm when questioned about their behaviours. They suggest that vulnerable groups may include the unemployed or drug-addicted and those susceptible to coercion, in particular, disadvantaged parents and children.

Ultimately, the intrusion inherent in any interview, as Bourdieu (1999) explains, is effectively an attempt to obtain a good representation of certain situations but, which can only be interpreted and may not cover all aspects of that situation. He, therefore, suggests that qualitative research practices need to control elements, such as verbal and non-verbal language, structural and symbolic issues and choice of respondents. The choice to interview practitioners and parents, for this research, was considered both logical and practical for the purpose of documenting perspectives on socially inclusive/exclusive behaviours.

Besides placing a high importance on ethical issues, the focus of this thesis is to define underlying theories and reflect on commonly-held values. Open discussions with participating parents have been considered the most ethical way to avoid exploiting parents who may be at risk of feeling uncomfortable in discussing their behaviours. As advocated by Mason (2002), morals and ethics are as important as the intellectual content in research. Ethical considerations need to be considered when framing the choice of questions, because of a need to ensure the interests of teachers/practitioners and parents/children are being served by the criteria (Mason, 2002).

#### *4.8.2 Integrity and Authenticity*

The challenge, for this research study, is to be able to truly represent and interpret other people's lives through creative, observational means but by not moving so far from scientific study that research accounts becomes purely narcissistic, egoistic and personal (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Bourdieu (1971) notes that a risk in seeking the lived experience of others is that the researcher may project their own lived experience on the study. Self-reflexivity can overcome this problem by ensuring the researcher expose their historical, cultural and personal situation. Even so, it is acknowledge that research can never be purely objective or value-free given the researcher's political and ethical subjectivity (Babbie, 2002).

Mason (2002) is confident that qualitative research is able to maintain integrity when conducted systematically, rigorously and with clarity, so as to elicit arguments which resonate to a wider audience. To ensure dependable and authentic outcomes, this research, therefore, includes a reflection of the researcher's background, description of contemporary ECEC services and examination of historical issues. All these issues are interwoven within an appropriate philosophical and theoretical framework in conjunction with the multiple voices of early childhood leaders, principals, teachers, practitioners and parents involved in LiL and CFC services.

The differing perceptions of what constitutes reality, however, continuously elicit debate over how to acquire accurate knowledge of the real experiences and influences motivating social behaviours. This research proposes that critical realism, post-positivism and reflexivity can assist in ensuring the most objective, dependable and authentic investigation of social behaviour. Within these paradigms, a qualitative interview study, of practitioners' observations and participating parents' experiences in LiL and CFC programs, is considered the most helpful way to deliver quality information.

#### 4.9 THE STUDY

Qualitative analyses are time consuming and, therefore, a total of twenty four participants were chosen, for this research study, as an adequate sample to “support the desired analyses” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 39). The design of this study incorporated sixteen practitioners and eight parents involved in ECEC services, namely LiL and CFCs situated in three designated low SES areas of Tasmania. The sample framework consisted of interviews with practitioners, principals, teachers and social workers, and informal discussions with parents who regularly attended these ECEC programs. The time constraints, involved in conducting qualitative interviews for this thesis, meant that the sample size was small. The data included practitioner and parent observations of many other families who are the target group of LiL and CFC services. Data were collected by means of a small hand-held recorder and the completed recordings were transcribed verbatim in a typed version. Thematic coding was used to categorise the most common themes which emerged from the study. These themes were analysed in terms of the theoretical framework and in relation to the research question.

The knowledge, gained from practitioners and parents, was sought as a way to confirm or refute theories which may refer to unrelated contexts. That is, this study endeavoured to avoid generalisations and assumptions that do not reflect the social reality experienced in actual practice (Somekh, 2002). For this research study, practitioners’ observations and parents’ accounts of their experiences were used as the basis for gaining knowledge around understandings of social inclusion and the emotional influences driving social behaviours.

This information was sought from people involved in the study setting, in the context of ECEC goals of facilitating social inclusion to reduce disadvantage (DEEWR, 2009). Information on social behaviours has been sought by documenting and analysing the perspectives of Early Learning Leaders, Principals, teachers, practitioners and parents involved in the Tasmanian Education Department’s Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centre (CFC) programs.

Data emerging from the semi-structured interviews and informal discussions have been analysed into the major themes which emerged. Practitioners’ professionally-based perspectives, informing their long term observations of many parents and children, as well as parents’ descriptions of their experiences in programs, have been examined and categorised

to highlight the most common issues. The interviews related to practitioners' perspectives on the concept of social inclusion and their recall of actual behaviours and conversations with parents and children involved in LiL and CFC programs.

#### *4.9.1 The interview*

The qualitative interview takes the form of a somewhat intrusive social relationship and, as Bourdieu (1999) suggests, can be subjected to many forms of distortions due to the influences of both researcher and participant. Overall, this research study represents an attempt to accurately represent the participants but also to instigate the discussion and engage in active listening without prompting and/or stressing the respondent (Bourdieu, 1999). While conducting the interview, there was an awareness of the differences in cultural and linguistic capital and a mindfulness to avoid what Bourdieu (1990b) calls "symbolic violence". Symbolic violence can be inherent in gestures, tone of voice and body language messages, which may have the effect of undermining confidence.

As Bourdieu (1999) suggests, the investigator starts the game. Cohen et al. (2011) explain that the practitioner interview is a research tool and differs from everyday conversation in that it has a specific purpose. Interviews need to be well-conducted and able to produce accurate data, and for this reason, interviews for this research were conducted with an awareness of a need to control biases from infiltrating the discussion. Social exchange encompasses many factors, such as trust, body language and cultural issues, resulting in many different participant reactions and responses being elicited (Cohen et al., 2011). The relationship between interviewer and interviewee can involve subtle non-verbal cues, which can affect the way the participant responds to questions (Hobson & Townsend, 2009).

While conducting interviews with practitioners and talking to parents, the focus of this study was to use simple vocabulary and remain mindful of avoiding ambiguous and prejudicial language, prompting or posing speculative questions (Cohen et al., 2011). Although endeavouring to make the interactions as normal as possible, it was usually impossible to escape from the purposeful nature of the interview. The design of this research study was to use non-directive informal conversations, with parents, to enable a natural flow. For example, one interview was conducted whilst walking in the playground with the parent who remained watchful of her child. This type of natural conversation, Cohen et al. (2011) note, allows for questions to arise without the appearance of interrogation.

Similarly, the open-ended interviews with practitioners, although following pre-prepared questions, allowed an opportunity to expand on topics and delve into deeper emotional areas. Interview questions were designed to encourage practitioners to think about the subject of the research, namely the concept of social inclusion, and to recall their observations and experiences. Care was, therefore, taken to ensure interpretations were explained and not assumed (Cohen et al., 2011). This research focused on documenting actual experiences and observations of practitioners and parents, without soliciting judgement or inference.

Face-to-face interviews afforded an opportunity to gain clarifications during the conversations, which is unavailable in inflexible survey questionnaires (Drever, 1995). The personal interviews enabled an acute awareness of the way mannerisms and body language can impact on interpretations of data; this provided many new facets to consider in the study. Although the interview process required a reasonable standard of conversational skill, the personal nature of the face-to-face discussion was beneficial in allowing the opportunity to pursue topics of interest as they arose (Drever, 1995).

One criticism levelled at the interviewing technique is the possibility of reduced reliability of data generation, because results are not repeated or replicated, as is the case with quantitative methods. This criticism is based on notion that, because the interviewer cooperates in producing the knowledge, there is a possibility that a different interviewer may generate dissimilar data (Hobson & Townsend, 2009). This problem was addressed, for this research study, by conducting a pilot interview to provide feedback on questions and enhanced clarification.

#### *4.9.2 Participant Observations*

Participant observations, recorded in the interviewing process, can help to bridge the gap between what people say and what they do (Atkinson et al., 2003). Consequently, this research study was conducted in the knowledge that a difference can exist between people's accounts and actual events, especially as informants must rely on their memories when relating evidence. While observations provide better access, the interviews proved beneficial in recording participant's recall of events. The interviews were also useful in documenting shared cultural understandings of social behaviours. An example of this shared understanding is articulated in chapter 5 where practitioners and parents discuss their world-views. Atkinson et al. (2003) suggest that social science involves both social interactions and



collective behaviours and, for this reason, it is important for the researcher to participate in the social worlds they study. While interviews may not provide precise insights into participants' lives, their emotions and memories, sentiments and motives can become apparent in their personal narratives.

Although feelings and influences are expressed in face-to-face interactions, Atkinson et al. (2003) caution a need for the interviewer to be aware of the issue of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is described by Festinger and colleagues (1956) as the presentation of an alternate self in situations where people are ill-prepared to be confronted by certain realities. The issue of cognitive dissonance did not arise in this study, because the parents, who participated, were regular attendees of LiL and CFC programs and, as such, did not need to discuss a reluctance to attend.

The reason that non-participating parents were not included in this study was to avoid the possibility of hurtful repercussions. This can happen if parents suffer guilt and shame, making them discount or ignore some behaviours (Bowlby, 1988). Shame is an emotion which involves a perceived negative evaluation by others and an element of self-blame, culminating in an urge to flee from the situation (TenHouten, 2007). Apart from ethical considerations, Bowlby (1988) advises that omissions in assessment may occur if parents are unaware of their potential problems or reluctant for the true facts to be known.

Practitioners, however, can take into account all aspects of each unique combination of child and parent features because, as Bowlby (1988) suggests, they can draw on their relevant training, theoretical perspectives and personal experiences. Practitioners' own theories frame the way they describe others' behaviours. Bowlby (1988) suggests that practitioners can become skilled in understanding social behaviours, just as doctors become familiar with symptoms of a medical nature. Ertmer and Newby (1993) also compare practitioners with doctors, suggesting that they are well placed to be able to diagnose specific problems and apply appropriate remedies.

For the purpose of this research, practitioners were in a good position to note patterns of behaviours. As Bourdieu (1999) explains, social agents mostly have no conscious awareness, or science, to explain the real source of their behaviours. Just as a midwife delivers a baby, it is the sociologist's role to bring to light the real issues hidden deep beneath the surface, according to Bourdieu (1999). Bowlby (1988) adds that practitioners, in their every-day work with children and adults, are in a good position to view causal processes backwards. That is, upon observing common behaviours in many children and parents,

practitioners are able to see the results of certain parenting styles in the growing child. Practitioners' observational knowledge is invaluable, because many people are reluctant to discuss their parenting behaviours (Bowlby, 1988).

Nevertheless, there are still risks of practitioners misunderstanding other people's behaviours, Bowlby (1988) explains. He suspects that misunderstandings may occur if clinicians or practitioners have a bias towards either children or parents or if they tend to reify emotions, by describing individuals as "filled with anxiety" or "bad tempered". For these reasons, Atkinson et al. (2003) advise on the importance of examining what people do rather than solely concentrating on what they say. Similarly, in documenting the written word, there is a need to analyse these accounts with an understanding that explanations are based on socially and culturally constructed frames of reference.

Consequently, this research incorporated both practitioner and parent accounts as the most natural and authentic way of gaining a deeper understanding of the motivating factors driving social behaviours. These accounts were considered helpful as they included the lived experience of participating parents and the perspectives of trained practitioners, equipped with professional knowledge and eye-witness observational information on social behaviours.

This research acknowledges the risks in ignoring observed influences on social behaviours (Spodek & Saracho, 2006). The aim was to overcome the omissions that can occur when concentrating purely on cognitive development, which does not take account of observed emotionally-based behaviours. The more complex task of gaining information, on the emotional influences motivating social behaviour, was undertaken by documenting practitioner and parent perspectives, observations and experiences. This method sought to encapsulate social behavioural nuances, often omitted in studies focusing on cognitive expressions (Spodek & Saracho, 2006). The following outlines the process in formulating the interview questions, recruiting participants and information gathering approaches

#### *4.9.3 Pilot Interview*

Prior to conducting the main interviews, a pilot study was undertaken to ensure the most relevant questions were chosen, with which address the research topic. Interview outcomes can be unpredictable and, therefore, a pilot interview was conducted in order to highlight, under real conditions, how questions may be interpreted by the respondents (Drever, 1995). The use of a pilot interview enabled positive feedback and a chance to gain ideas on perceived difficulties that could emerge, and, therefore, ensure a better preparation for the

actual interview (Drever, 1995). The pilot interview was helpful in improving the quality and relevance of both the interview style and question content (Baker, 1994). For this research study, any ambiguous, inappropriate and/or complicated questions were eliminated to ensure the main study procedures would not elicit poor responses (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Overall, as van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) explain, the pilot interview enabled a better interpretation of questions and feed-back on re-wording where required. Practical issues were also alleviated by using the pilot interview and these included, ensuring a better response, establishing a reasonable time frame and improving ways of contacting interviewees and distributing materials.

The only limitations, in using a pilot study, relate to quantitative research where there is a risk of making inaccurate predictions and contaminating data. Conversely, for this qualitative study, the pilot data have been included as a means to enhance the focus of topics and to fine-tune the analysis. The questions posed, during the pilot interview, were an extended version of the final interview questions, used for the current study (Appendix A). During the pilot interview, all the questions were modified to reduce ambiguity, repetition and the possibility of “leading” questions. The overall focus of the questions, however, remained the same; that being, to examine contemporary understandings of social inclusion within ECEC approaches, in the context of those involved in LiL and CFC programs.

#### *4.9.4 Study Sample*

While interviews can produce high quality data, as Drever (1995) suggests, they are mostly time consuming and, therefore, a total of twenty four participants were recruited for the study. The units of analyses were (1) families attending LiL and CFC programs and (2) practitioners’ perspectives on “social inclusion” and their accounts of social behaviours, based on observations of parents and children involved in the programs. Analyses were based on data emerging from semi-structured interviews, comprising open-ended questions put to early learning leaders, principals, teachers and community inclusion workers. More informal discussions were conducted with parents about their experiences as regular attendees of LiL and CFC programs.

#### *4.9.5 Interview Questions*

The interview questions (Appendix A) were designed to allow the teacher/practitioner to express their perspectives on the concept of social inclusion and to describe their

observations, particularly in terms of patterns of social behaviours observed in parents and children for whom ECEC programs were implemented. The open-ended questions focused on practitioners' perspectives of the concept of social inclusion and their role of facilitating family engagement in ECEC programs. Questions also related to practitioners' observations of parents' and children's interactions together, and with other families and facilitators. The choice of semi-structured interviews for practitioners and open-ended discussions for parents was beneficial, because it allowed an opportunity for participants to express their perspectives on issues, which were particularly significant to their situation (Hobson & Townsend, 2009). The approach, in asking all practitioners the same questions and inviting parents to comment on the same topic, allowed for more legitimate comparisons with other participants in the study.

#### *4.9.6 Recruiting Participants*

In order to recruit participants for this study a meeting was arranged with two early learning leaders. Following this meeting, emails were sent to principals, LiL teachers and CFC community inclusion workers, in three designated areas in Tasmania, advising them that they would be contacted regarding proposed interviews. Teachers and practitioners were also asked to recruit one or two interested parents who regularly attended their programs. After contact was made, potential participants were sent a covering letter and an information sheet (Appendix C) requesting a time to be scheduled for them to participate in a fifteen to thirty minute interview at the respective LiL and/or CFC premises. Information sheets (Appendix C) were provided, describing the study and indicating that confidentiality and anonymity of participants would be protected. On receiving email notification from interested participants, an interview date and time was arranged. Sixteen practitioners, including social inclusion workers, teachers, principals and early childhood leaders (see Appendix B) agreed to participate in the interviews. Practitioners and teachers organised a total of eight parents to partake in the study (Appendix B); four each from LiL and CFCs.

Interviews with practitioners and discussions with parents were conducted at the LiL and CFC settings. Although the timeframe of interviews was suggested as fifteen to thirty minutes, times varied and were often extended to allow the conversation to flow. All three CFC premises were very new and modern and had a specific interview room available. The visits to CFCs typically allowed an opportunity for a guided tour and explanation of the design, purpose and programs/activities on offer.

In contrast, the LiL programs were held in the school setting and interviews were conducted before, after and sometimes during the scheduled sessions. LiL parents were interviewed in the playground and in the classroom and while programs were in progress. Principals and teachers all chose to take part in the interview at lunch time or after school. During the interviews for this study, fifteen of the practitioners responded enthusiastically with only one participant appearing slightly reticent. All eight parents were equally keen to relate their experiences in the ECEC programs. The more relaxed conversations, without a sense of cross-examination, resulted in parents being consistent and positive in discussing their experiences. Similarly, the interview questions, put to practitioners, were informal and designed to address the main research aim, which was to examine social inclusion issues regarding participation in ECEC programs.

The parameters of the study were based on designated low SES sites of CFC services, which have been purposively situated to address high rates of disadvantage in these environments (CFC website, 2011).

LiL and CFC services were chosen, because both are focussed on facilitating social inclusion and community integration with the goal of improving socio-educational attainment and reducing social isolation for families in need of support. The twenty four participants included: two early learning leaders, three principals/assistant principals, five LiL teachers, five CFC community inclusion workers, one CFC music therapist, seven parents and one grandparent, all involved in ECEC programs in three low SES areas in southern, northern and north-western Tasmania, Australia. LiL programs are attached to primary schools, whereas CFCs have been set up in low SES areas, close to primary schools. Both programs are designed to assist parents and their children to engage with other families, access specified health, welfare and community services and to provide optimum opportunities to enhance social inclusion for children and families (CFC website, 2011).

#### *4.9.7 Intervention and Intrusion*

The interventionist nature of seeking information was apparent because, although practitioners were very generous in offering their time, their attention was sometimes being sought by parents, students and other staff during these times. A criticism of qualitative research methods is that they can be an interventionist way to gain evidence and may verge on being unethical. For example, research with an interpretivist political orientation, can often become radical in pursuit of democratic values (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this

study, rather than pursuing purely democratic ideals, the principal concern was to uphold ethical principles and ensure a minimum of intrusion.

The ethical considerations, for this research, included ensuring that the questions covered relevant issues and that confidentiality, harm-minimisation and informed consent were observed (Dowling, 2010). Subsequently, any names, inadvertently mentioned in interviews and discussions for the study, were carefully anonymised in the transcript. All participants were assigned pseudonyms (Appendix B) on all transcript information, reports and publications of the study. To ensure accuracy and avoid misinterpretation of information, the typed copies of specific transcripts were emailed to participants for their verification and editing, prior to the data being included in the study output. The final corpus of data consisted of one hundred and nineteen pages of typed transcripts containing the verbatim accounts of participants, which were recorded from their verbal testimonies.

In this study, practitioners' and parents' memories of their own and others' behaviours were expected to describe events and actions rather than the reasons behind them, unless the reasons were evident in the observed behaviours (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). Overall, this research study endeavoured to overcome the problem of the direct interview, where participants are assumed to speak the truth, and the anomaly between what people say and what they are really doing (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). Similarly, while professionals are highly skilled, some may be unable to conjure up a mental image to match the behaviours and experiences of some of the families they meet in their work (Bowlby, 1988).

It is conceded that there can be no absolute certainty that interview accounts are truthful or that direct observations give a completely reliable account of people's actions (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). Accounts of interviews were written down and retrospectively interpreted, and it is possible that these interpretations may be related to the researcher's personal experience of the topic. Nevertheless, the final product, by including the spoken words of practitioners and parents, is expected to add context and layers to the story. As this research utilises a diverse range of participants, any similarities in observations is expected to add to, rather than detract from, the authenticity and dependability of the findings (Atkinson, & Coffey, 2003).

#### *4.9.8 Informed Consent - Ethics Approval*

Drawing on Mason's (2002) advice, that gaining informed consent is a crucial factor when conducting observational research, the study's participants were initially asked to sign

consent forms (Appendix D). The consent form indicated their willingness to partake in the study and truthfully answer questions regarding their work, experiences and observations within ECEC programs. During the interviews for the research, practitioners and parents discussed the behaviours they observed in other parents and children, who were unaware that they are being studied. This situation can present an ethical dilemma itself (Babbie, 2002) but was overcome by protecting the identity of both practitioners and parents and gaining their informed consent. A de-identified list of participant details is attached (Appendix B).

Approval for the present study has been obtained from the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (No. H12475) and Education Department, *Permission to Conduct Research in Tasmanian Government Schools and Colleges*, which required the relevant character and police checks.

#### *4.9.9 Analysis of Data*

The content of the study interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed, which enabled the verbal conversation to be converted into written form and analyses drawn from the relevant information (Gibson, 2009). Indexical transcription was used to create an index, with which to highlight the most interesting answers. For this research study, the transcription method was used to describe how the themes were produced. This method was preferred to unfocused recordings, which concentrate more on detailing meanings (Gibson, 2009). In seeking to determine motivations driving social action, this study consisted of analysing and assessing the most common themes arising from the transcripts. Practitioner interview responses and parent accounts were thematically categorised and the data analysed around the theoretical framework. This research analysis utilised thematic coding to categorise phenomena, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). To categorise phenomena, data were broken down into parts which were examined and compared for similarities and differences. The data were used to reflect behaviours, revealed from the interviews with practitioners and participating parents. Major themes arising from the data were interwoven within the theoretical framework and linked to the research question. The data were, therefore, categorised for the purpose of identifying theoretical or descriptive notions and to construct a framework of ideas (Gibbs, 2007).

Subsequently, common themes, arising from answers to the interview questions and parents' accounts of their experiences, were examined as they related to the theoretical framework which explains the impact and development of emotionally-based dispositions.

This method draws on Gibbs (2007) advice that both concept-driven and data-driven groupings can incorporate theoretical concepts but remain open to any new themes which may arise.

Major and sub-themes were, therefore, arranged under headings and included vignettes of practitioner and parents accounts, with pseudonyms used in place of real names. The use of vignettes aligns with Gibbs (2007) suggestion that narrative accounts can be useful in conveying people's experience in a natural way and highlight the way actual events are portrayed. A theme hierarchy enables a comparison of events, observed by practitioners and experienced by parents, and provides a systematic means of recording the respondent's views on social behaviours.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explained how this research endeavours to overcome the tendency to assert authority and presume that the objects of research are somewhat socially deficit or in need of emancipation. The aim is merely to document understandings of parent and child social behaviours in ECEC settings by interviewing practitioners and talking to participating parents in LiL and CFC programs. Chapter 4 has shown how the study seeks to uncover patterns of social behaviour by linking real-live accounts of experiences and observed social behaviours with appropriate theories. This chapter has explained how the study is based on a belief that parents' accounts of their experiences, while attending programs, are invaluable. Similarly, practitioners' face-to-face, long-term observations, together with their perspectives on cultural and social policy influences, are considered the optimum method of gaining knowledge on the intricacies of social behaviours. These methods were chosen as a way to gain informative data without compromising the vulnerable.

The methodological approach of this study has endeavoured to overcome fallacies in epistemology, homogeneity and causalities. The approach taken for this research offers a strong theoretical and philosophical framework, with which to capture the most helpful information on contemporary ECEC understandings of social inclusion. The philosophical underpinnings framing the critical realist, post-positivist stance, and the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative methods, have been explained in this chapter along with challenges facing educational and sociological research. The practicalities and ethical considerations in choosing to interview practitioners and talk to parents have also been discussed as an important consideration for this research.



The following two chapters consist of the interview data and cover the views of practitioners and parents, based on their involvement in LiL and CFC programs. Chapter 5 separates the practitioner and parent views; firstly describing the main issues for practitioners, followed by their perspectives on social inclusion facilitation. The next section covers the main issues around LiL and CFC participation for parents, and consists of the most common themes arising from the informal discussions.

## CHAPTER 5 - DATA

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This chapter analyses qualitative data, comprising the perspectives of twenty four practitioners and parents. Their perspectives were sought on the concept of social inclusion and social behaviours, and were based on their experiences and observations within the ECEC programs, Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centres (CFCs), in Tasmania, Australia. The data were drawn from typed transcripts of recorded face-to-face interviews with practitioners and discussions with participating parents, for the purpose of gaining perspectives on contemporary understandings of social inclusion within ECEC programs.

Data were categorised under the headings, depicting the most common issues arising from the practitioner interviews and parent accounts, to help to explain influences motivating social behaviour and social inclusion. The data were examined in terms of cognitive and emotional influences driving social behaviour. Practitioners and participating parents, for example, appeared influenced by cognition (awareness) of social inclusion strategies and principles (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009). As choice is implicit in the facilitation of social inclusion, decisions to participate depend on families being willing to engage (Scott, 2012). That is, families need to be motivated to utilise support services and, upon realising their need to become socially included, possess a desire to enhance their children's socio-educational prospects.

This research seeks information from practitioners and participating parents, who have absorbed the message that the optimum time for children to gain social and educational benefits is in their early years. Cognitive reasoning seems to motivate these parents to consider the long term benefits for themselves and their children, and influences their decision to participate in LiL and CFC programs. This study also seeks knowledge as to why other parents may not be inclined to participate and the emotional influences which may impact on their decisions/inclinations. The theories and face-to-face interviews were used complementarily for the research to examine how some parents may be motivated by emotional responses to social situations while others may respond more to a cognitive awareness of the long term benefits of social inclusion programs.

This study examines the emotional influences on social behaviours by drawing on Bourdieu's (1974) ideas, which suggest that social differentiation, attributed to early-learned

social dispositions, can affect social behaviour and consequential socio-educational attainment. By examining social dispositions (mannerisms) as possible contributors to social inclusion/exclusion, it is possible to understand why omissions can occur when disadvantage is defined simply in terms of structure/agency accounts of economic and/or cultural impacts (Bourdieu, 1974). Accordingly, this research explores the concept of social inclusion by considering the possibility that emotionally-based dispositions may drive cognitive decisions to participate in social gatherings, such as LiL and CFC programs. In order to examine practitioner and parent perspectives, on the facilitation of social inclusion in LiL and CFCs, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first details practitioners' perspectives on the facilitation of social inclusion, based on their professional training, experiences and observations of families involved in these programs. The second describes participating parents' accounts of their own experiences and observations within LiL and CFC programs.

### 5.1 PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES ON LiL AND CFC PROGRAMS

For this study, practitioners' perspectives on the facilitation of social inclusion in LiL and CFC programs were sought. Information, gained from practitioners' responses to face-to-face interview questions (Appendix A), has been categorised into common themes and interwoven with the theories framing the research. The questions, asked of practitioners, related to their understandings of the concept of social inclusion, experiences in facilitating inclusive practices and observations of social behaviours within their programs.

The following analyses of practitioner responses was made with the understanding that the aim of ECEC programs is to reduce disadvantage and promote equality by means of access to early childhood social and educational supports (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009). As Watson (2009) explains, it is now the role of schools to promote social inclusion by maximising the educational achievement for disadvantaged families and to ensure all children are afforded equal opportunities. Bourdieu (1974) suggests, however, that it may be optimistic to expect the education system to facilitate social reform. He states that social capital is derived from early learned dispositions and is different from, but equally as essential as, economic or cultural capital. In other words, Bourdieu (1974) questions whether social capital can be acquired through educational means if the foundations of social inclusion are laid very early in life, in the familial environment. His explanation is that these early-learned social dispositions have the most enduring effect on future educational, social, cultural and economic success. Bourdieu's (1984) idea, that social dispositions can have a

detrimental effect on educational attainment is contested by Nash (1990), who argues against the notion that a socialisation theory can explain individual action. In order to uncover the extent to which the education system can facilitate social inclusion, this section concentrates on practitioners' responses to questions to gain their perspectives on social inclusion, social behaviours and ECEC participation. The following table summarises the practitioner cohort and some similarities and differences between LiL and CFC programs.

**Table 5: Launching into Learning (LiL) and Child and Family Centres (CFCs)**

<b>Launching into Learning (LiL)</b> leaders, principals and teachers (n=10)	<b>Child and Family Centre (CFC)</b> community inclusion workers/therapists (n=6)
<p>Social inclusion principles understood and implemented by early childhood-trained and qualified teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set time frame for programs</li> <li>• Teachers structure programs</li> <li>• Collaborate with CFCs</li> <li>• Varied organised activities</li> <li>• Parent-child engagement purpose</li> <li>• Personal development programs – out-of-school time</li> <li>• Positive media stories</li> <li>• Outreach services</li> </ul>	<p>Social inclusion principles implemented by practitioners, trained in social work and/or specialising in attachment, early childhood, parenting, community and Indigenous work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible, open daily 8.30/9am-4/5pm</li> <li>• Practitioners organise courses</li> <li>• Collaborate with LiL programs</li> <li>• Community input regarding activities</li> <li>• Music therapist to strengthen parent-child attachments</li> <li>• Attachment programs voluntary</li> <li>• Community inclusion purpose</li> <li>• Links with services and NGOs on site</li> <li>• Positive media stories</li> <li>• Outreach services – Child Protection</li> </ul>

*Information drawn from LiL and CFC websites*

Across LiL and CFC programs, early learning leaders, principals, teachers and community inclusion workers adhere to social inclusion goals that aspire to ensure equal opportunity for all children through parental involvement in ECEC programs. The social inclusion goal is to facilitate access to structural and practical supports for families, ensure inclusive practices and enhance socio-educational prospects for all children. Practitioners are cognisant of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) curriculum guidelines and their professional perspectives are

informative in explaining how these strategies are used in ECEC programs to improve social inclusion, especially for families who most need assistance.

The following data analyses contain two sections. The first section discusses the most common issues highlighted by practitioners and the second outlines the theoretical perspectives they use to explain the social behaviours they observe. The data, derived from interviews with practitioners, include vignettes of actual responses to encapsulate the way answers to questions were expressed in reality.

In accordance with the thematic coding method (Strauss & Crobin, 1988; Gibbs, 2007), the following headings were taken directly from the transcripts. These issues were identified as the most commonly repeated concerns reported by the practitioners.

### *5.1.1 Main Issues for Practitioners*

The issues, most frequently expressed by the practitioners, were concerns around:

- (a) Promoting awareness of social inclusion benefits
- (b) Ensuring families feel comfortable
- (c) Structured and/or relaxed approaches
- (d) Improving participation
- (e) Catering for differing groups
- (f) Recruiting isolated families

#### **(a) Promoting awareness of social inclusion benefits**

Responding to an interview questions, which invite practitioners to highlight the main issues impacting on social inclusion facilitation, all sixteen practitioners described, in various ways, the difficulty of informing and enlightening some families of the benefits of being socially included. Practitioners were unanimous in expressing the difficulties in imparting cognitive awareness and acceptance of the value of attending programs, without invoking a negative response. CFC worker, James, was aware of the need to be sensitive in avoiding an emotional reaction, if parents consider they are being told what to do:

*We know what works and what doesn't but it's getting the parents to see it for themselves – and making them realise – they know the answers. For them to accept, be accepting of those answers... rather than just being told what should really be happening.* (James, CFC worker)

Early learning leaders were keen to convey, to families, the advantages of being socially included and how social support and integration can be gained through access to services. Practitioners' work was based on implementing the practices set out in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) curriculum; this National framework is designed to assist educators and practitioners who work with families and their children from birth to five years. The development of EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) is based on the need for children to form trusting relationships and acknowledges that the family is the primary educator. Even though play is acknowledged as an important tool for learning, practitioners are now required to instil trusting relationships by encouraging parents to engage more with their children:

*..to educate parents to see the importance of what we're doing, so, they're not just playing...and having fun ...actually fine motor skills and language skills and if we can get the parents to learn that's why we're choosing to do this then the parent might be more likely to go and copy it at home. (June, leader)*

June explained how parents were encouraged to engage with their children in a playful way to help with their literacy, numeracy and social skills. The idea was:

*to make play visible to parents...so that we do what we call learning stories. (June, leader)*

At the same time practitioners tried to show parents how to be alert to their own responses and, if their child's behaviours were inappropriate, to feel comfortable in discussing ways to encourage more sociable behaviours:

*...express themselves as well and sort of being observant adults – the parents can sort of see that and yes, you can discuss with parents about, you know, how your child is ... not willing to share. (June, leader)*

Practitioners explained that the best way to instil positive behaviours was through role modelling. They said that their experience and observations had shown them not to assume that all children would have been taught even basic social behaviours, such as sitting at a table for meals. Role modelling, therefore, helped them convey the rules that were expected to be followed in programs:

*...show them ways ... just things like we sit the children up to eat their fruit for morning tea. They may never have sat at a table...they might not even have a table in*

*their house, let al.one sit at it to eat meals all the time, so its understanding ...simple things that we expect. (Mary, leader)*

Facilitating new ways of thinking, in order to instil more helpful social behaviours is not a simple task, as Nash (1990) explains. Although cultural practices are mostly arbitrary, if the education culture does not align with the culture of certain family groups, the ability to transmit the program's preferred cultural practices will be lessened. As Nash (1990) states, families who have differing values to those expected in the education setting, may feel culturally alien and unable to benefit from the strategies in place. Bourdieu (1990a) doubts that education programs can act arbitrarily. He notes that, in reality, practitioners/teachers will find it naturally easier to respond to parents/children who are keen to participate, as opposed to those who are inclined to withdraw.

Enlightening families, who have differing cultural practices, of the benefits of participating in ECEC program can present challenges. Practitioners know their role is to encourage parents to engage with their children, as well as to socialise with other parents, but especially for parents to actively interact with their children, to strengthen bonding and enhance social learning. Sue said she wanted to avoid the situation of families coming to her sessions just to relax and have a chat and ignore the purpose, which is to interact with their children:

*You want them to be working with their children at the same time, because you can fall into the trap of having some parents that come along – their child can just run around and do anything and they can sit back and chat and not do things with their child, which is what the purpose of Launching into Learning is. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

It is clear that one of the main underpinning objectives of ECEC programs is that parents be encouraged to interact with their children. As Coyne (2013) notes, this approach is in line with the shift in early childhood approach, which now seeks to integrate attachment-based psychodynamic neuroscience considerations into practice. Practitioners are now expected to ensure that parents understand the importance of paying attention to their children's state of mind by using interactive behaviours and language.

Regular attendance in the ECEC programs is, however, necessary to ensure that parents have the opportunity to gain optimum socio-educational benefits for themselves and their children. Nevertheless, in order to maintain regular attendance in programs, families

first need to feel relaxed and comfortable, especially on their first visit to the unfamiliar setting.

**(b) Ensuring families feel comfortable**

Nash (1990) describes the phenomenon of self-exclusion, which occurs when people feel rejected in an unfamiliar social setting. Similarly, Bourdieu (1990a) suggests that difficulties occur, because of the constraints and demands imposed on people to behave in particular ways in certain circumstances.

Within CFC programs, for example, Vanessa noted that parents, who were unaccustomed to the rules and boundaries, tended to self-exclude and withdraw from the mainstream group. Often when new families arrived, Vanessa observed that some seemed unaware of the protocol and just seemed to do their own thing without making an effort to engage in the activities:

*If a large group of parents come from out-of-area and don't understand Child and Family Centres and why we're here and that it is a community networking opportunity, and they just sit by themselves and don't include themselves in the activities that are going along – that can make it difficult for a parent that's coming in to the space, because they're being sort of segregated and isolating themselves.*

(Vanessa, CFC worker)

To avoid this situation, CFCs are specifically designed to minimise segregations and ensure people could move through the different areas seamlessly. CFC settings are organised as a “soft entry” point so that families could more readily assimilate:

*Eventually, they're included in the conversation (and) the flow of the space and, yes, the design facilitates it most definitely and that was part of the brief - that it would be a welcoming space and that the kitchen was there as a meeting hub.* (Vanessa, CFC worker)

The focus for CFCs is to ensure a welcoming atmosphere which encourages families to be able to mix in a non-threatening environment. This is also the case with LiL programs, which, although slightly more structured and school-oriented, are aimed to create a welcoming ambience.



### (c) Structured and/or relaxed approaches

While the interview questions (Appendix A) did not ask practitioners directly about attachment issues, the need to assist parents with engagement and bonding arose as a major goal within ECEC programs. LiL teachers were mindful that, although play-based, there was an ECEC purpose behind all the tasks, which differed from the more relaxed free-play model of the past, as Theobald et al. (2013) note:

*...children need their parents to work with them, because that's the purpose of Launching into Learning...so it's not a traditional play group where we just go...and we have a play. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

Some practitioners, for example, Tracey (CFC worker) and Julie (LiL teacher), preferred a more flexible, adaptable style; while Sue (LiL teacher) liked to be more in charge to ensure that the activity goals were achieved. She explained that there was a:

*purpose behind everything we do and why I've set those things up, why we're doing it and the teacher is in charge...to take control, bring everyone back to the group again, discuss our rules and that kind of thing. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

Julie, an early childhood teacher who was involved with both CFCs and LiL, preferred the casual relaxed style where practitioners/teachers could interpret the situation and instigate programs to suit. Julie suggested that teaching style was a matter of preference and although teachers were highly trained, some would simply impart information without having any real understanding of parent-child issues. As a consequence, she was concerned that some families were not getting the understanding and support they needed, because some programs:

*are rigid and regimented - casual works best – the teacher interprets. Some are not early childhood trained teachers...have no empathy or understanding of people/children - run program like a classroom. CFC is not like a school – we want children to interact. (Julie, CFC and LiL teacher)*

Sue, however, preferred the structured approach and suggested that the families, who attended her LiL sessions, responded well to her purposeful activities and were eager to comply with the rules and instructions in order to gain long term benefits for their children. This concurs with Bourdieu's (1990a) suggestion that the school culture needs to mirror the values and habits of those who participate. Sue related that:

*people...tend to come here (who) are looking for that kind of structure as well. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

There is no doubt that the aim of both LiL and CFC programs is to create an atmosphere where all families feel relaxed and comfortable. Sue preferred to be in charge of her organised, pre-planned activities. While she was pleased with the extra resources available, she found that the relaxed, spread-out setting of CFCs was not always practical. Always endeavouring to create a welcoming atmosphere, Sue maintained that the structure and purpose enabled her to assist parents and their children to engage in interactive and purposeful activities:

*When I tried the one at CFC, I couldn't really provide that, because of the space of CFC...yes, there was no way to...the parents that came on that Friday afternoon just wanted to sit up the top and have their coffee and the children were coming to play...whereas the group (LiL) is about parents working with their children, engaging with their children, gaining skills, learning things that they need, understanding what skills their child needs, to start school. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

As Sue said, LiL strategies were designed to deliver results but she did concede that her programs were:

*becoming a bit too hectic and too busy...but what is the purpose for coming, if not to do activities which encourage parental engagement and child learning? (Sue, LiL teacher)*

Overall, the aim of ECECs services, such as LiL and CFCs, was to foster an interest in early learning, parental involvement and social inclusion and to be accessible so that these ideas could be communicated, understood and accepted. The issue of participation is, consequently, central to the success of programs.

#### **(d) Improving participation**

Allman (2013) asserts that issues of social inclusion/exclusion have recently become more focussed on social rights. These social rights relate to availability and access to services as integral to participation and paramount in ensuring all families have an equal opportunity to gain socio-economic wellbeing.

To provide easy access to services and programs, CFCs are open from 8.30/9am until 4/5pm to ensure families are able to drop in at any time during the day. The Education Department of Tasmania has implemented these centres in easily accessible, designated areas throughout the community, which are specifically non-school-oriented. Community inclusion worker, Vanessa, explained how easy access and a welcoming environment were the main features of the CFCs design to encourage participation. The emphasis was on accessibility and the provision of a welcoming, non-school, environment:

*We hope that we could help parents in this area to access the centre a little bit more readily...they have easier access and I guess we're not a school. (Vanessa, CFC worker)*

Promoting a desire to attend is paramount and both CFC and LiL programs offered a variety of programs and activities designed to encourage families to participate. LiL teacher, Jane, observed that the more sociable families appeared more enthusiastic than those families who needed extra support from the programs. In an effort to encourage some of the disengaged families, Jane instigated a specific activity solely for this group. Rather than increasing the enthusiasm of the target group, however, her innovative strategy created ructions within the regular families:

*You know I'm trying to offer something to this particular group of people...well that didn't rock their boat and this didn't rock their boat and I wonder if this will and we only had it for a small group of people...then you get the other group saying "Oh, that's not fair, we should have...how come we don't get to go?" (Jane, LiL teacher)*

Another way practitioners tried to enhance participation was by using popular technologies, that are commonly used to communicate. They found that the most effective way to make contact was through texting and using social media sites, because most families had access to these means of communication. Unfortunately, the use of technology, while improving access to information about services, sometimes reinforced the lack of parent-child engagement. James observed that most parents possessed the latest technologies and seemed to enjoy checking their phones and social media sites, but that this distracted them from interacting with their children:

*They... have an iPhone but yeah, and quite often they'll just come with the kids and sit on the phone for hours and not engage with their children. (James, CFC worker)*

As a means to encourage participation, various incentives have been offered to encourage attendance at LiL and CFC services. The growth of CFCs, Tasmania-wide, is a relatively recent initiative, as is outlined in the Centre for Community Child Health, Phase Two Report (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2013). After consultation with community leaders and parents, the design of these centres became the initial incentive with which to encourage participation. All three CFC centres, visited for the study, appeared modern, impressive and highly resourced. The purpose-built structure, interior décor and exterior landscape denoted high standards of creative design. Based on community input, each CFC was different but all exuded a charming atmosphere, with planned garden areas, tastefully decorated indoor spaces and fully resourced kitchen, computer and sitting areas. The CFC buildings were designed to reflect the people and history of the area and to provide the most comfortable and well-resourced community gathering space. These centres have been constructed using the most fashionable and elegant designs and materials; all areas appearing functional, purposeful, comfortable and stylish.

An interesting, albeit unintended, outcome of the provision of such fashionably designed CFCs was noted by Bridget, who stated that the modern appearance initially proved a disincentive for many people. Bridget related that the ultra-modern appearance of the premises proved daunting for some families who were hesitant to enter. She commented that the people, for whom the centres have been initiated, seemed to feel they did not belong in such a “posh” space. To overcome this, practitioners in one centre tried to make the areas look more “lived-in” so that people would feel more relaxed on visiting. Bridget claimed that, because the building looked so new and modern, some people became anxious about how to behave and worried about doing the wrong thing:

*We struggled, when we opened our CFC, to actually have people to come in, because of the beautiful setting...it just wasn't like home, wasn't comfortable for them, yes, so once it's started to get a bit messier and we had a lot more things around it wasn't so new and people weren't worried about where you put your cup, all of that kind of thing, it's taken twelve months for that feeling to go. (Bridget, leader)*

As Bowlby (1973, 1982) states, an early acquired self-perception and expectation of other peoples' responses can impact on a person's ability to participate in unfamiliar environs. The difficulties in adjusting to the new CFC setting, was noted by Raelene. She observed parents who, especially on their first visit, seemed to be experiencing difficulties in trying to avoid embarrassment. Simple things, like being unsure of where to put their prams, created angst:

*...not knowing what to do in a new place, what was expected of them, where to park their pram.* (Raelene, CFC worker)

LiL teacher, Helen, also noted that the inviting surroundings and resources could not compensate for the anxious feelings some people experienced:

*people feel uncomfortable in programs no matter how beautiful the surrounds are...just makes them feel worse.* (Helen, LiL teacher)

Practitioners observed that rather than functioning as an inducement, the modern well-resourced centres proved more of a deterrent for some parents, who initially seemed to become anxious at the very appearance of unfamiliarity. Nash (1990) explains how behavioural dispositions and family attitudes to educational institutions will determine the cost/benefit of fitting in, as opposed to feeling inadequate, in unfamiliar cultural groups. Similarly Bourdieu (1984) notes that the issue is that some people are unable to negotiate social relationships in a culturally prescribed fashion. That is, some people will feel alienated in places in which they are unsure of the "rules".

Education leader, John, found success with the offer of one reward, which seemed to entice many reluctant families to attend an out-of-school-hours support program. John observed that those parents, who seemed to have little interest in self-development sessions or programs to assist with reading, were tempted and motivated to attend sessions upon being offered a more desirable and tangible reward:

*We had a session...all free "helping your children with numeracy". Five parents turned up. Tomorrow night, we're having a session where, if parents turn up they get to take an iPad home for their child. Right, forty seven of the sixty parents are turning up...they don't give a rats about the reading...but they all want to have the technology that they can't afford. If I offer them assistance with reading, only my middle class parents turn up.* (John, leader)

Similarly, in an effort to encourage reluctant families to attend programs, CFC worker, James, described a one-off Fun Day, organised by his centre. Although this function proved effective, the cost prohibited regular implementation of such initiatives:

*Our greatest inclusive day was where we had people coming from everywhere. We held a family fun day and it was on a Saturday and we had over a hundred and eighty people, families and a lot of them you'd never ever seen before and they were those vulnerable families...a lot of activities for children...went for about four hours...but the preparation and the cost involved in running something like that was enormous so it's just not practical. (James, CFC worker)*

It seemed that families, who were disinclined to attend CFC and LiL programs, could be motivated to participate if the rewards outweighed their reluctance to attend. Nevertheless, many families who were fearful of institutions avoided attending, despite the benefits and supports available.

#### **(e) Catering for differing groups**

One LiL teacher spoke about being aware of parents in the community who needed extra support, especially those whose children were returned from foster care after involvement in the Child Protection system. She was of the opinion that these families were often fearful, because of their many negative experiences with institutions. As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, early childhood and historical experiences predict a person's response to future interactions in certain settings. Practitioners were aware of families in the community who would benefit from participation but who were the least likely to attend programs. Helen said:

*They're back in the community and they're not engaging in anything that's really helping build those skills as parents. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

Allman (2013) discusses the idea of exclusion, which for those suffering social deprivation, is not simply an issue of poverty but more about being disconnected. As education leader, Bridget commented, the experience of trying to mingle with others, despite the welcoming, modern setting and offers of support, could be difficult. Bridget observed how some people behaved even in the company of the most friendly, helpful people, who tried their utmost to assist. She described socially excluded people as appearing very sensitive to their feelings of not belonging and lacking the confidence to move around comfortably within a new group:

*...there's some people...come to our centre who still feel not socially included even though they're around other people...adults exclude people, so that even happens and we worked it out to make sure it doesn't but it does, so that's another reason why some people don't come...the more people are working together over there, they're forming their groups and their adult relationships, the harder it is for somebody to come in and try to fit into that, so it's not quite, you know, if you don't have a level of confidence in your own self...it would be quite daunting, I think. (Bridget, leader)*

Although people, in these situations, may not realise that they purposely exclude themselves or others, practitioners regularly observed certain patterns of behaviours. Bourdieu (1990a) explains how some people may exclude themselves, as well as other people, as this behaviour is part of their make-up; that is, derived from all their experiences and making their actions more spontaneous than intentional.

Practitioners observed that, apart from being deterred by feelings of social exclusion, some families experienced other more practical obstacles. All sixteen practitioners related issues, specific to differing groups of parents, which impinged on their ability to become involved in ECEC programs. The information gained for this study was that differing family groups have specific group issues; single dads, teen mums, families whose children have been involved with Child Protection agencies and parents with both babies and toddlers.

A common theme, arising from the data, was the difficulties in accommodating specific groups and organising various activities to suit. For example, there was an issue around very young female social workers accompanying single fathers and their children on excursions. While all workers are trained to act in a professional manner and deal respectfully with varying groups of people, uncomfortable feelings could arise with certain age and gender combinations. Mary explained that:

*Young females who don't have any children of their own, they don't go on their own, they go and they take a male with them, not because they feel threatened just as a precaution...going off with a bus load of men they don't know. (Mary, leader)*

Another group, the teenage mothers, were particularly sensitive to being in environments where they felt singled out and judged. Education leader, June, related how the teenage mothers' group proved unsuccessful, merely because young mothers were in the habit of avoiding situations, in which they may feel scrutinised:

*Teenage mums group...didn't happen...they couldn't be seen or singled out into a single young mum's group...they feel as though they're very judged, their pride – it's like people are looking down on them...you know, you've made the wrong choices so you're being looked down upon. (June, leader)*

In contrast, another group of new parents had embraced the CFC environment and inclusion worker, Vanessa, attributed its success to the welcoming atmosphere and outlay of the building. Vanessa suggested the success of her New Parent group relied on the practice of giving new families priority to ensure they gradually felt more comfortable. This strategy seemed to have met with success:

*We do have groups, like our New Parent group who pop themselves in the separate space in here or down in the nest but it doesn't give that feeling of exclusion or their own little group...not sure of whether it's the physical outlay or the building - looks like a big house and when they come in it feels like a house and it is immediately welcoming. (Vanessa, CFC worker)*

CFC centres were open for all families with pre-school school children, and who required varying degrees of support needs. CFCs offered extra assistance to parents who had been involved with Child Protection, who suffered post natal depression or who simply did not wish to socialise. Resources were, therefore, available to enable specific families, such as those involved with Child Protection services, to hold access visits at CFC premises.

Vanessa remarked that the centres were beneficial for parents who:

*...just want to get out of the house and come somewhere where your children can play, you may not be in the mood to be part of the hub of the kitchen or the buzz of programs. (Vanessa, CFC worker)*

Inclusion worker, Vanessa, gave an example of how those parents, who were not ready to socialise, could utilise CFCs. She described one father who was happier to do some gardening with his child rather than mix with other parents and children:

*One of our very vulnerable and high needs dads came into the space on his own today but he was able to sort of find his own space here in the centre, like, for example he went outside down to the back slide with his son and then he went down the side of the building where he could do some digging and so he didn't need to be in the four walls*



*of the ... community centre because there was lots of places for him to be able to, not hide away, but to be in his own little space and you know for him that was important, because if he'd have come and felt uncomfortable he wouldn't have come back again.*  
(Vanessa, CFC worker)

A practical issue commonly mentioned by practitioners was the safety concerns in having toddlers and babies in the same space. Education leader, June, noticed the problem of mixing babies and toddlers in the same area, because:

*some mums with little babies will not come into a toddler event – the child might get run over.* (June, Leader)

All children, attending CFCs were supervised in a caring and safe way by their parents and the qualified workers. Practitioners noted that parents with more than one child/infant experienced difficulties in organising themselves and their children to attend. CFC workers, at one centre, said that families with babies found it easier to attend the morning sessions:

*Afternoon programs don't work.* (Tracey, CFC worker)

Apart from the diverse needs of different groups of families, the most difficult task, mentioned by all sixteen practitioners, was recruiting socially isolated families, who were the target group for LiL and CFC programs.

#### **(f) Recruiting target families**

The main issue, highlighted by all practitioners, was the difficulty in recruiting the socially isolated families for whom the programs were originally implemented:

*...the hardest to get are the ones that we're really focussing on.* (Mary, leader)

One explanation of people's social isolation is offered by Bowlby (1988) who describes the issue of negative affect, being a person's lack of trust and negative appraisal of certain situations. Similarly Bourdieu (1984) suggests that some people estimate the probability of success or failure in decisions to engage in social situations. As Bowlby (1988) explains, the social resilience required for seeking support relies on one's earlier experiences of feeling worthy or expecting such support. While there is no evidence to prove that negative affect

causes some people to avoid the very programs which would be of benefit, practitioners observed that the families most likely to engage appeared more resilient.

LiL teacher, Sue, acknowledged that the programs were meant to cater for those families in need of social involvement. She observed that the families, who were most likely to attend, were generally those who would seek services anyway:

*Launching into Learning (was) devised and put into place for the more isolated families but they find that difficult...LiL was originally set up for the disadvantaged but...most participants are confident parents who would always seek out programs and activities to engage with their children anyway...disadvantaged...very hard to recruit and, therefore, the cohort of attendees (are) mostly...parents with good social skills. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

Socially isolated families were not visible and therefore difficult to contact. All sixteen practitioners expressed concerns in being able to find and encourage these families to participate in ECEC support programs:

*Where are they? How do I find them? They don't want to be included. (Mary, leader)*

CFC and LiL practitioners gained information on all new parents through Child Health and Parenting Services (CHAPS). Parents firstly needed to fill out the forms stating that they were interested in participating in programs. Families who failed to register an interest were, therefore, not on the list. Although CHAPS had information on new parents, they could not release information unless parents agreed to be listed. Jane stated that it:

*...doesn't mean that we'll get the families and not all families sign forms, so, yes, one of the problems is we don't know who's out there sometimes so our Child Health nurse can't give us any information that's confidential. So, unless that form is signed she can't give us – and she knows there are many people who say “No, I'm not interested, don't want to know”. (Jane, LiL teacher)*

Most CFCs, however, had the availability of a child and maternal health nurse to help families to take the steps to attend programs. LiL teacher, Sue, explained how CFC collaboration with CHAPS enabled the provision of information on most of the isolated families in their areas. Upon finding the addresses of known isolated families, contact was

often made by delivering packs containing information, books and games. In this way, families could be visited again to pick up used packs and deliver new ones.

Nevertheless, making contact with isolated families always involved a personal visit and a knock on the door. The need to actually knock on people's doors was an issue, because of the intrusive nature of appearing to persuade people to do something "for their own good". Sue described how this process entailed a certain skill and was not always successful:

*...you don't get very far with door knocking...so again it's finding them and then when you do know they're there, how do you get that "in". (Sue, LiL teacher)*

Some families were simply not available and James noted the difficulties in finding contact information on itinerant families. He was aware that certain families regularly moved house:

*A lot of families tend to move areas quite often... they could be there one month and you go back and they could be gone...this trend is slowing a bit, because of the cost of doing things... housing in Tasmania isn't as easy to access. (James, CFC worker)*

The difficulty of engaging some families remained a challenge for workers in their role to facilitate social inclusion. James agreed with LiL teacher, Sue's observations that disengaged families' reluctance to attend was directly in proportion to socially included families' willingness to be involved:

*In terms of vulnerable families that are our targeted audience, they're not engaging...the families you see walk through the door are engaging families...so we rely on those families going back into the community and, by word-of-mouth, to hopefully engage other families in the area. (James, CFC worker)*

Relying on word-of-mouth communication did not always bring results, according to LiL teacher, Helen, who observed an interesting phenomenon in some families in terms of their apparent aversion, or inability, to engage in networking. She noticed that participating parents commonly shared information with their friends and seemed keen to spread the word about community activities and supports.

The less-involved parents did not seem to be in the habit of engaging in that kind of social discourse. Bowlby's (1988) theory explains that some people appear to doubt other's goodwill and that their low levels of trust and avoidant behaviour adds to their risk of social isolation (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004).

Helen suspected that some parents seemed averse to giving advice and were not in the habit of telling others what to do:

*I find here, too, that other mums find it hard to be advocates, so you don't do that word of mouth...in the middle class area we would find that another mother would be saying "Oh, you should bring your kids to the play group, it's great fun" but we don't get it much and I feel like the mums, here, think that it's none of their business what someone else is doing with their kids. They feel like that's somehow that's telling someone to do something and they don't like being told to do something...they don't feel comfortable doing that. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

Bowlby (1988) describes that compulsive self-reliance behaviours are examples of the means used to avoid rejection and prevent the anxiety of having to rely on social means of reducing stress. Practitioners' observations support the notion that being socially included requires access to specific social knowledge and degrees of self-efficacy (Watson et al., 2005; Allman, 2013). That is, a person needs to feel confident and worthy in seeking and expecting support.

Rather than concentrate on social dispositions as impacting on social inclusion, the social policy focus now seems to be placed on external obstacles. External obstacles, such as access to participation and opportunities are now emphasised as the main issues in seeking to ameliorate social exclusion (Allman, 2013). The focus on equality, reform, access and participation seems to place the fault of exclusion on the person rather than the difficulties they experience within culturally defined societal structures (Allman, 2013).

All the practitioners, involved in this study, related their frustration in convincing socially isolated families of the benefits to be gained from regular participation in programs. Nevertheless, following the idea that participation is the key, both LiL and CFC services have been positioned to ensure easy access, a welcoming appearance, supportive practitioners and productive activities, all aimed at encouraging families to attend.

Despite every effort being made to ensure programs and activities are relevant, that practices are inclusive and that a wide range of supports are available, the most difficult issue for practitioners was encouraging parents, who need assistance, to participate. As education leader, Penny, reported, those who were most inclined to attend programs were not the families who needed support:

*Most of the parents (who) come are often well connected as well, and more confident. So, we know we still have a number of parents (who) don't come. (Penny, leader)*

The ability to make friends is another issue discussed by Bowlby (1988) and others (Ladd et al., 2006) who stress the importance of the primary relationship to engender connectedness and autonomy and ensure consequential social competence. Thus, the ability to make friends, care for others and secure meaningful relationships, all seem to relate to one's early attachment style experience (Bowlby, 1988).

Participation is a crucial aspect of the facilitation of social inclusion, but the only way LiL and CFC services are able to reach isolated families is by means of an outreach service. Outreach is a one-to-one service, where practitioners visit families who are not participating in programs. Although the goal of this type of service is for isolated families to participate in programs, outreach services alone are unable to facilitate social inclusion unless the families begin to regularly attend and interact with other families.

Education leader, June, discussed the specific groups visited by practitioners, which include Indigenous families, those who have recently arrived from other countries and parents needing extra assistance. Understanding the differing cultural practices and responses from diverse groups also requires that practitioners behave sensitively to culturally-specific social needs. June spoke about being:

*constantly on outreach to try and find the people who don't access services....particular groups ... Aboriginal, Torres Strait, refugees or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Families, dads...teenage parents... grandparents raising children...the ones that might need that extra support. (June, leader)*

Practitioners highlighted the specific issues associated with the outreach work, one of which was the time factor. For example, one of the education leaders, Penny, explained the extra time and energy required for outreach work. In view of the travelling and time needed to establish a trusting rapport, part time teachers could only handle one family at a time:

*It's very time consuming and you need to go in - and so the family that our outreach teacher has been working with - at the moment, she's only working with one family...can't just do a one-off visit and expect them to come (need) to build that relationship in a genuine way takes several visits. (Penny, leader)*

LiL teacher, Sue, agreed and stressed that, because of time constraints, the majority of families in need of help could not be visited:

*It's time-consuming. We've got lots...when we went through the list there were twenty five high needs families but I only work one day a week. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

Another issue, outlined by education leader, Penny, was the potential risks in visiting some isolated families. She advised that outreach practitioners need certain specialised skills to be able to cope with this work:

*You know, they really do need a specific set of skills base... interpersonally, they need to have the right set of skills, be absolutely non-judgmental and be able to work with parents, aware of risks...you definitely need the right person to do that. (Penny, leader)*

Outreach was also costly and early learning leader, June, explained how funds had been provided to targeted schools to ensure teachers had time to engage in home-visiting. The purpose of these visits was to get to know the families who were not participating in programs. She emphasised how early learning leaders were committed to meeting with government services, such as CHAPS and Child Protection as well as non-government providers, to encourage reciprocal relationships.

Many initiatives have been instigated to advertise the advantages of early family support and community service collaboration. Practitioners, therefore, were motivated to find innovative ways to inform families of the benefits of services, such as those offered by CFCs:

*...Communities for Children...actually actively working in programs in the school...making contact with families and bringing them in...focussing on community partnerships...strategies, letterbox drops, standing at supermarkets, putting events on...using Child and Family Centres. (June, leader)*

Lil teacher, Jane, stressed that outreach work was not an easy option, because of the task of encouraging disinterested families to engage, willingly, in programs. The stark reality of visiting non-participating families was highlighted in the following description, given by Jane as she arrived with great trepidation on the doorstep of a non-participating parent's home. Jane realised that she represented a different class; a professional who was endeavouring to convince parents to participate in an activity "for your own good":

*This middle-class person rocking up to somebody's house and I'm standing on the doorstep in the rain for twenty minutes, because they don't want me in the home...rocking up at the door saying "Hi...I'm from the school, would you like to be involved in one of our programs...would you be happy for me to come and do a visit every now and then and bring a bag of books?" ...or "I'm running a play group down in the park in a fortnight, would you like to come?" "No", it's or "No, I don't like going to the park" or "No, my child's in Day Care on those days" or "No, I really don't like people in my house".(Jane LiL teacher)*

Although Jane seemed quite sceptical, she was hopeful about the many initiatives being continuously implemented for the purpose of encouraging isolated families to participate in programs. Another teacher, Helen, appeared more positive about family visits and described how connections were made by regularly taking books and leaving them on the doorstep.

A further initiative was the setting up of play groups for practitioners to give parents information on programs and obtain their phone numbers for future contact. In order to meet non-attending parents, practitioners sometimes handed out leaflets near the kindergarten, in the hope of instigating conversations with parents about the programs. Unfortunately, after all these efforts, Helen was of the opinion that most of these families were not taking up the suggestion to participate in programs, despite the enthusiasm of practitioners:

*The Book Swap program...just dropping things at the door and then gradually the person gets more comfortable...we run Pop up Play Groups and we get some phone numbers from that...also run them in the kindergarten yard...so that mothers who are taking children to kindergarten, who might have young children...we notice lots of kids walking past...have a very positive conversation with the family and you give them all the information but they actually don't take that next step and come...that's our biggest thing is trying to get them to actually come. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

In conclusion, all sixteen LiL and CFC practitioners noted very similar issues impacting on their support program goals to facilitate social inclusion. The most often repeated challenges were (1) trying to create understanding and awareness of the importance of being socially included, (2) encouraging families to participate by ensuring they felt comfortable in program settings, (3) catering for differing family groups and (4) recruiting the most isolated families. Based on their observations, practitioners contemplated on how these issues arose and

resorted to theories to help understand behaviours and address social inclusion barriers. The following outlines practitioners' theoretical perspectives around social inclusion, based on their observations of patterns of social behaviours, in families for whom LiL and CFC programs have been specifically designed.

### 5.1.2 Practitioner Views on Social Inclusion

Table 6 indicates major theoretical themes highlighted by practitioners, such as stigma, positive image, class issues, attachment and free choice.

**Table 6: Practitioner Theories on Social Inclusion**

<b>Practitioner Perspectives on Social Behaviour</b>	<b>Early Learning Leaders</b>	<b>LiL Teachers</b>	<b>CFC Inclusion Workers and Therapists</b>
<b>Stigma</b>	Discrimination can occur if parents feel judged	Positive image can reduce discrimination	Positive media stories ensure low SES areas have a better image
<b>Attachment (parenting)</b>	Emotional regulation/parenting bonding issues	Parents need to work with their children	Improve bonding through music and role modelling
<b>Cultural Issues</b>	Some families feel intimidated and unable to fit in	Middle class values do not match reality	Some families feel uncomfortable mixing with others
<b>Free choice</b>	If families are aware of benefits they may choose to participate	Some parents prefer to choose childcare	Choice is implicit in decisions to participate

*Information drawn from research interviews*

Practitioners reflected on theoretical ideas in understanding why targeted families face social inclusion challenges and in devising ways to improve participation rates in ECEC programs. The sixteen practitioners, who participated in this study, described their own perspectives on social behaviours and the theories they used to explain and ameliorate disadvantage and inequality. These included observations and theories alluding to:

- (a) Stigma as discriminating
- (b) Positive image to enhance social inclusion
- (c) Cultural issues impacting on suitability of programs
- (d) Attachment style and social behaviour
- (e) Choice to participate



Practitioners' training, theories and work experiences inform their perspectives on observed patterns of social behaviours. One of the practitioners suggested that disadvantage could be reduced by removing the discrimination attached to living in certain areas.

#### **(a) Stigma as discriminating**

Strategies to reduce social exclusion reflect efforts to contend with stigma, which is thought to discriminate families living in certain postcodes. As Allman (2013) explains, the concept of stigma is a post-Enlightenment idea, whereas the issue of social exclusion has existed throughout history.

CFC worker, Josie, was of the opinion that stigma presented an extra barrier to social inclusion, because it labelled people simply based on their addresses. She expected that attitudes towards people, living in certain areas, could be changed by providing regular positive stories to the media. For Josie, a way to reduce stigma was to enhance the image of the community and she did this by advertising the benefits of CFC services to show positive images of people involved in programs. The need to improve the perception of people living in certain areas was important for Josie, because:

*the hardest thing about living here - it's often the stigma attached to living in the community.* (Josie, CFC worker)

#### **(b) Positive image to enhance social inclusion**

Positive media messages were often used to assist in uplifting the image of the community. Two of the practitioners, interviewed for the study, stated that they released regular good-news stories to the media to expose the opportunities and support services available for families in their programs:

*We also work hard on reducing the stigma attached to people who live here and we do that by having positive media stories as often as possible.* (Josie, CFC worker)

Similarly, LiL services regularly provided positive feedback to the media. Television and radio networks often conducted interviews with confident parents to project a positive image of the benefits of attending the programs. The families, for whom the programs have been implemented, however, did not reflect this confident image.

For example, LiL teacher, Sue, described a family who had been receiving intensive outreach assistance since arriving in the area. Although this family appeared quite stressed

and worried, Sue stated that she remained hopeful that time and familiarity would help them to eventually fit in. Sue had invested a great deal of time and energy in this family<sup>6</sup> and was confident they would eventually find it easier as long as they maintained regular attendance:

*She doesn't mix with the other families that well but then it's all so hectic...she's very quiet and probably wouldn't have said a word to anyone but I don't really care – she talks to me and...she would speak if she was spoken to but she's worrying about her children – but the first and foremost thing is that she's actually made it through the door and if she's still happy to come back, that's good and eventually she will feel more confident and I'll word someone up to go over and...to make more conversation and it's just a matter of her keeping coming back and feeling comfortable. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

### **(c) Cultural issues impacting on suitability of programs**

The impact of cultural differences was an issue that commonly arose in the interviews and practitioners said they observed how parents had diverse lifestyles and world-views.

Education leader, John, suggested that community leaders, who were involved in deciding on the best type of support strategies for disadvantaged families, had little understanding of their real needs. John believed that ideas on ways to facilitate social inclusion were often drawn from certain narrow views of the world, and did not always reflect reality. Assumptions had included the idea that education could actually remove disadvantage by teaching children how to be socially included. John's comments echo those of Bourdieu (1999) who suggests that education values have no meaning for the marginalised, beyond the school environment.

The idea that the school system can instruct on social behaviour, as a simple educational matter, is contentious. Nash (1990), for instance, is hopeful that socialisation can occur in the school environment and suggests that education is capable of shaping consciousness and overriding the power of family-acquired habits. Bourdieu (1984) argues that although methodical, instructional learning can be deep, the effects of very early social learning within the family are more durable. It seems that it is only when the family pattern fits with the education culture, that already-held master cultural patterns can be absorbed (Nash, 1990). There may, therefore, be a need to expose the structural principles guiding regulated practices, because people can only act rationally if they are able to step outside their

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<sup>6</sup> After six months this family continues to regularly participate in LiL programs (follow-up email)

automatic ways of behaving (*habitus*) (Nash, 1990). Similarly, policy makers and practitioners need to be able to stand back from their own life-style to fully appreciate other cultural dispositions and ways of being, if they are to provide real assistance to disadvantaged families. Rancière (2007) suggests that equality can be achieved, by educational means, if it is affirmed from the start; that is, equality needs to be assumed. Bourdieu (1999) explains that this thinking denies the hidden cultural issues which create inequalities.

Education leader, John, observed the reality of the cultural barriers facing some of his families and understood why they found it difficult to participate in support programs. Having grown up in the area, John observed the way social inclusion problems could be exacerbated by people with middle class values. He suggested that those, who were in a position to make decisions, had little idea of the issues and choices available for families in need of assistance. As an educator with many years' experience in low SES school communities, John believed that the issue was not that some parents were uncaring of their children but that they had different values:

*Some people wrongly think they (parents) don't care. They do care. I have met the occasional one where they don't (but) it's wrong, they do care but they're different, they have different goals and aims for (their children). (John, leader).*

The problem, according to John, was a lack of understanding of the reality of some people's lives because of their differing values; that is, the possible futility and harm of imposing unrecognisable standards on those who simply needed support. Nash (1990) adds that certain groups differ in the respect they afford to a culture of literacy and it may be presumptuous to assume that everyone complies with a belief in the importance of education.

The sentiments of education leader, John, were that he noticed how decision-makers drew on their own experiences and lifestyle in designing programs for the disadvantaged families. He suggested that most decision-makers were unaware of the diverse lifestyles and values of some families, and often assumed that all parents would be sufficiently motivated to participate in support programs. These myopic assumptions were evident in the conversations John heard when he attended meetings with community leaders who devised strategies to help disadvantaged families:

*What I was hearing was all middle class values, "Right, we'll have a mentor, we'll have goal-setting, we'll show them this, we'll show them that". I don't think that they realise that for some of these families (they) don't give a rat's about that, about*

*education and things. They have a life that many of them are quite happy with and there may be other things that would make that life better but we look at it from the perspective of a middle class person, looking at education and not looking at it from someone who's never valued education.* (John, leader)

John also spoke about other families who did subscribe to the values of education, thus dispelling the assumption that all families, living in low SES areas, were the same. He noticed that those families, who were inclined to attend the ECEC support programs, seemed to hold certain similar values:

*The parents that we get, who come along, are either working parents, which we do have, or those are outside the norm of the non-working parents who do have a drive for their children.* (John, leader)

Generally, the parents who regularly attended programs seemed highly motivated to enhance their children's education and were keen to be involved and have a say. The observations of education leader, June, were that families, who showed an interest in their children's schooling, were also comfortable in stating their opinions:

*Parents are becoming a little more demanding – they've been involved in LiL for three or four years and they know that teacher really well.* (June, leader)

Practitioners, such as LiL teacher, Jane, noted the way social skills were evident in an ability to feel comfortable in social settings but that these skills were not necessarily related to class issues. Jane commented on a scenario where families, from different social groups, come together. She noticed how some parents were able to ensure they felt comfortable by using tactics, such as keeping busy, when other parents were involved in conversations. Jane observed that, although groups with similar backgrounds tended to gather together, it was really a matter of having the skills to find a way to “fit in” and be relaxed in mixed groups:

*I'm just sort of thinking about the couple of lower socio-economic families in that group. They probably tend to...they are acknowledged and accepted by the other families and...chat, but probably the lower socio-economic families keep themselves busy by doing tidying up sort of things and they're probably more helpful than the other mums who...are chatting, yes so they find other ways to make themselves comfortable in that environment.* (Jane, LiL teacher)

The subject of class also interested Lil teacher, Helen, who had previously taught at a school in a more affluent area. Helen reflected on her teaching experiences in diverse environments and was surprised in discovering that social problems were not confined only to low SES families. She related how she had observed incidences of anxiety in children of middle-class families, whose parents were very busy but had high expectations for their children to succeed. Based on her teaching experiences, Helen concluded that emotional problems and substance abuse existed across the classes but were more visible in the low SES areas:

*Children with anxiety issues you see in that environment, in an upper middle-class environment, that's because we all have to perform really highly, our parents are working really hard and very busy people and life is pretty full on, the expectations are really high...there are a lot of issues with anxiety in children and that was really, you know, interesting for me to see in that, yes, a different sort of culture, completely, from here but obviously lots of issues in terms of some of that emotional/social stuff but in different ways...the other thing about middle class society, things are hidden, there can be an alcoholic parent and things like that but people know how to wrap it up and hide it away, where here they don't even try. Middle class have different types of resources and other skills. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

Apart from cultural issues, practitioners were aware of theories alluding to a need to improve parent-child attachments, as a way to overcome social skill problems. Both LiL and CFC programs encouraged parent-child engagement as a way to improve socio-educational skills for children and enhance social engagement for parents. Parent-child interaction activities were, therefore, an important aspect of the programs.

#### **(d) Attachment style and social behaviour**

Practitioners, such as education leader, June, noted how behavioural issues related to the way some children had been parented. June had observed the impact on children who may not have been exposed to many group situations or whose parents were anxious and/or inadvertently controlling.

As Ladd et al. (2006) and Bowlby (1973, 1982) explain, the major repercussion of controlling and/or neglectful parenting experiences is in the child's difficulties in securing and maintaining appropriate and meaningful relationships. June, an education leader,

observed that children, whose parents were controlling, appeared unable to initiate behaviours and learn from mistakes:

*Some children...come in to the Launching into Learning groups who don't interact...a little bit socially inept... probably been their upbringing. They haven't had a lot of socialisation opportunities or confidence or...the other flip side of the coin being, having really controlling parents, you know the ones that won't let them – speak for them and do things for them and all of that. (June, leader)*

In addressing the need for parents to appropriately engage with their children, a music therapist visited various centres with the aim of encouraging closer attachments between parents and children. The focus on enhancing parent-child attachments was done in a very sensitive and subtle way through the medium of musical activities. Differing strategies were implemented for differing child age groups:

*My strategy is the tool of music, such as familiar singing, dancing, instrument playing, music games to work on things, goals, such as parent-child attachment, child development, behaviour management...in a really fun way so children and parents don't really know that we're working on those goals.*

*Working on parent-child attachment with a baby is quite a bit different, so we do lots of cuddling and nurturing and so on, we do lots of bouncing songs that encourages mum or parent/primary carer to turn around and face their child. (Claire, therapist)*

Claire received referrals from Child Health, Child Protection and external agencies, where there was awareness of families needing to improve the bonding experience between themselves and their children. Bowlby (1951, 1988), Sroufe (2005) and Crittenden (2005) emphasise the importance of early parental engagement to enable the child to be able to interpret social cues and understand social contingencies. The psychosocial repercussions of this lack of bonding are, therefore, manifested in relationship difficulties and subsequent psychological disorders (Bowlby, 1988). Through the medium of music, Claire endeavoured to encourage bonding behaviours between parents and their children. Attendance was, however, voluntary and parents were able to make a choice to attend:

*(Families are) referred to me for things like an insecure attachment with their children to give, provide an opportunity for parents to do some meaningful play and*

*interaction with their children and it's actually motivating, so if they're going to come to a Parenting Program, it's not pitched to the Parenting Program, it's just pitched to the music...less threatening but they learn all those really important things...completely voluntary...they're encouraged to come and there's quite a lot of support. (Claire, therapist)*

Encouraging attachment security was a high priority for CFC worker/therapist, Tracey, who observed that a major obstacle, in the facilitation of social inclusion, was the prevalence of passive parenting. Tracey observed many people who seemed unable to assert themselves as parents. She remained confident that parents could be assisted, in a sensitive way, in acquiring alternative ways of parenting. Tracey found that, in a busy atmosphere, it was easier to surreptitiously assist parents with more helpful behaviours. During the bustle of activities at the centre, Tracey subtly guided parents without drawing attention from other families. She described one particular CFC setting where many activities were taking place simultaneously. The multiple tasks involved in cooking lunch, for example, provided an atmosphere where practitioners were able to gently encourage positive parenting practices where needed:

*We have some really good success with Magic 1 2 3, it's a free service...Triple P Parenting sessions...no parent likes to hear that they're not doing a good job, but it's up to (us) to give them the tools to success. (Tracey, CFC worker)*

Experience and training has provided all practitioners with an awareness of the sensitive nature of discussing children's behaviours with their parents. They were, therefore, cautious in conveying any hint, towards parents, of their need to re-assess parenting practices.

Bowlby (1988) explains that many parents are unaware of the way their actions impact on their child's reactions and may feel defensive when confronted with the idea that their behaviours may contribute. He stresses that, when helping parents, the intention must not be to blame parents as they are merely responding to their own generational practices without any knowledge of alternative behaviours.

Practitioners expressed concerns with a trend they observed, where increasing numbers of very young children seemed to be diagnosed and offered medication for behavioural conditions, particularly ADHD. Although, practitioners realised that discussions of generational parenting dysfunction could be a very sensitive subject, they were:

*...worried about the lack of parenting skills - amount of children coming through that apparently have ADHD...parents want medication when it's actually a parenting problem...generational parenting problem... get referral from paediatrician...too easy to refer. (Nellie and Raelene, CFC workers)*

*If child is out of control, parents want assessment for ADHD - if doctor won't refer they'll go to another doctor...no-one sitting down and asking the parents why. Anxious parents make anxious children (but you) can't be too confronting with parents. (Tracey, CFC worker)*

The issue of facilitating improved parenting practices required high degrees of diplomacy as the risk of offending parents was high. Encouraging some parents to engage with their children often necessitated creative strategies:

*A big challenge is getting the mothers to actually engage with the children...so, we're doing lots of work with mothers around their actual involvement...take photos and videos...able to sit down with the mother and say "Look what he was doing when you weren't there and then look how he changed when you were there" ...it's a big challenge...you can actually see how the child's face changes, their whole interaction changes when the mother's engaged. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

At one CFC setting, a specialised parenting program appeared to be attracting certain parents with high degrees of insight and a determination to improve their parenting behaviours. Parents were offered a choice to become involved in this program, because it involved video-filming parent-child interactions and discussions around the child's responses to their parent's behaviours. This focussed parenting program was held in a separate area, where video cameras allowed parents to discern the effects of their behaviours. As this method could be confronting, it was open for particular parents who expressed an interest to participate. The idea of this parenting program was that parents could actually see their children's behavioural responses straight away. Parents, therefore, needed to be prepared and willing to follow the process of the program:

*In a separate building Growing Together is run by early childhood teacher - more like a classroom... Parent can be companions in children's learning – purpose (is) to bring awareness to parents...in this moment - this is what your child is doing - this*



*not for everyone - it's too rigid and too confronting for some parents.* (Raelene, CFC worker)

This type of program has been criticised because of the cost and risk of the photographing overtaking the actual parent-child engagement:

*Too much photographing rather than engaging with children, also resources, lack of funding.* (Raelene, CFC worker)

The focus of the Growing Together program is to avoid the situation where parents may suspect they are being instructed on ways to readjust their parenting behaviours. This program was designed to help parents to realise, themselves, by actually seeing the benefits of engaging with their children. This is a non-compulsory program which allows parents the opportunity to choose to attend when they feel ready to gain awareness of the impact of their behaviours:

*It's about schemas. Parents have the opportunity to film their child and talk about what the child is doing, what stages...this is not for everyone...So, it's not picked – parents have to be at a certain stage of life – have to be ready...focussed on children's development and making parents aware of things.* (Raelene, CFC worker)

As Watson et al. (2005) suggests, it is mostly the parents with high levels of self-efficacy who appear willing to choose these more confronting programs. The idea of free choice arose in discussions with CFC worker, Raelene, when talking about programs, such as Growing Together:

*This program is open to everyone but some families choose not to do it...lots of choice, you can pick what program you want – never any pressure.* (Raelene, CFC worker)

Participation, in any of the programs associated with CFC and LiL, is a choice. ECEC participation is completely voluntary and the onus is on families to exercise a choice and be motivated to participate in the programs which offer social inclusion opportunities.

#### **(e) Choice to participate**

The notion of mutual obligation and the social contract promotes the idea of agency and active participation. Reay (2010) suggests that choice features strongly in the concept of

*habitus* and that choice is only constrained by a person's access to opportunities and life circumstances. The Bourdieuan perspective differs in conceding that the concept of choice is a blurred; that is, many people are limited in knowing what they can think and do, because of their own sets of rules and behaviours (Nash, 1990).

One practitioner suggested that, when given too much choice, some parents may not participate in programs. For example, when transport was arranged for a family, it worked better when parents were given a set time to be ready, according to CFC worker, Vanessa:

*If they're given a choice they'll let the day wear on and nothing has happened for them during the day and suddenly it's 4 o'clock and they haven't visited the centre.*  
(Vanessa, CFC worker)

This scenario may be an example of what Bowlby (1988) calls disorganised behaviour, related to an inability to implement a plan of action. Rather than being perceived as an emotionally-based inability to plan, some interview responses tended towards instrumental rational choice explanations of non-social behaviours. For instance, some participants were of the view that parents make choices in deciding whether to attend ECEC programs, together with their children, or to place them in childcare.

Helen, one of the LiL teachers, commented that no matter how attractive the ECEC venue, how supportive the practitioners and how interesting the programs, many parents were choosing the option of childcare:

*You know, so they can choose to be non-involved, so, yes...and they can choose to have childcare as an option instead – and they see that's good for their children...but it's also good for them.* (Helen, LiL teacher)

*Some parents are being given access to very cheap childcare...don't want to engage with programs...can choose that option where they don't have to attend...very few times when the parents would have all their children at home all the time with them...won't necessarily go down to "coffee and chat"...they won't go to any of the guest speakers or join in with our First Aid class.* (Helen, LiL teacher)

Practitioners were of the opinion that choice was implicit in parents seeking social inclusion benefits and, as a result, they could only be assisted if they chose to participate. The major issue was to actually find a way to encourage parents to make the choice to attend and

appreciate the benefits offered by the programs. Helen, for example was of the view that social inclusion facilitation encompassed:

*...finding ways, ensuring that everybody has the same opportunities, socially, in the community **if they want that to happen**...finding ways of helping people recognise that it's good to participate in the community.... I think it is about choice and sometimes their choice, though, is coloured by previous experiences and they can't move in to making new choices. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

*That comes from them (parents) - it's a course that they want to do, it needs to be their choice, to be relevant to them. (Vanessa, CFC worker)*

As Helen suggested that merely providing information would not prove successful if parents choose not to participate:

*...if a family chooses not to be involved in programs that have been offered...I think we have to accept that, because it is their choice....we can keep on giving them information about what's available but it is ultimately their choice (Helen, LiL teacher)*

The perspectives of practitioners were gained from their involvement in LiL and CFC where they had the opportunity to observe large numbers of families over time. Practitioners also drew on their training and experience when theorising about the social behaviours of families.

Nevertheless, despite the challenging aspect of encouraging socially inclusive practices, practitioners were extremely enthusiastic and heartened by the results they had achieved. They observed how participating families had gained immense benefits from the community services, support programs, training opportunities, activities and educational attainments available from participating in LiL and CFCs.

This next section outlines eight parents' descriptions of their own experiences as well as their observations of other families involved in LiL and CFC, ECEC programs. The discussions began with the statement, "Tell me about your experiences in the programs" and ended with, "What do you think are the big issues about LiL and/or CFC programs?" The parents who participated in this research study all regularly attended these programs, situated in low SES areas in Tasmania. The sample comprised of seven mothers and one grandfather, four from CFC and four from LiL.

## 5.2 PARENT ACCOUNTS

The eight parents, who took part in the discussions, were all regular attendees of ECEC programs. They all expressed an awareness of the social inclusion opportunities and appreciation of the chance to improve their children's socio-educational prospects and wellbeing. Watson et al. (2012) describe wellbeing as a state of being happy and confident, feeling autonomous and in control, possessing problem-solving skills, resilience, attentiveness and an ability to relate to others. With more emphasis on the reciprocal nature of wellbeing, Bowlby (1979) equates a sense of wellbeing with an ability to relate to others and form supportive relationships. Therefore, although wellbeing relates to self-esteem, it is also about trust in others and expectations of fair treatment, support and belonging.

In their own various ways, participating parents displayed an understanding of the role of ECEC programs as a preventative measure aimed at enhancing their own and their children's social inclusion. Watson et al. (2012), however, suggest that the concepts of wellbeing and social inclusion are subjective and difficult to define. As a theoretical concept, Allman (2013) suggests that the modern idea of social inclusion has come to symbolise the social contract between society and its members and the unrealised social rights of people who are excluded through no fault of their own. Contemporary understandings of social inclusion, however, do not often take into account the issue of alienation which may be felt by some people (Allman, 2013).

Clearly, the eight parents, involved in this research study, did not display feelings of social alienation as they all appeared to have social dispositions conducive to being able to engage with others within the school culture. Their social dispositions were evident in the way they spoke with confidence, assuredness and an awareness of their own and their children's needs. Similar to Watson's (2009) findings, this research noted that parents with high degrees of self-sufficiency were the most inclined to attend support programs. The following vignettes, of the conversations with parents, highlighted their social confidence.

### *5.2.1 Main Issues for Parents*

The main issues, emerging from the short discussions with eight parents (including one grandparent) were:

- (a) Program success
- (b) Feeling comfortable and "fitting in"

- (c) Program strategies
- (d) Parents' choice
- (e) Non-participating parents

**(a) Program success**

The Launching into Learning Study 2007–2014, Progress Report (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2010) shows evidence of improved educational performance in children who attend ECEC programs and increased community networking benefits for parents. Similarly, Child and Family Centres in Tasmania Phase 2, Action Research Project (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2013) reports CFCs' success in promoting higher levels of community engagement and the uptake of training opportunities by parents who become involved.

The success of ECEC programs was evident in the accounts of four particular parents, who expressed a high degree of satisfaction at the obvious results they observed in the children who attended the programs. One of the main observations, parents cited, was the marked difference between children who have, and those who have not, attended the LiL programs. Parents observed one prominent behavioural benefit for children who were involved in the program. LiL children displayed an ability to make friends and appeared confident in being away from their parents when they commenced mainstream schooling:

*You can see the kids that have been through LiL but obviously when they start kinder – that they've already got that start - they usually can separate easily from their parents...happy to just make friends. (Tess, LiL parent)*

*Teachers say they can tell the difference from the ones that have been through the program. (Miriam, LiL parent)*

The eight parents all showed an acceptance of the importance of early learning and an acknowledgement of the benefits of ECEC programs. LiL parent, Sarah, for example, praised the quality of her teacher and subscribed to the programs' ideals, which were to enhance children's social learning and educational outcomes through parental engagement. Sarah was focussed on her daughter's wellbeing and this was reflected in the respect that she held for the LiL teacher. She expressed an understanding of the program's social inclusion aims and could see the results in her daughter's ability to socialise:

*It's lovely, we're a very, you know, quite a tight knit groups that ...my daughter has learnt so much...like they say the first five years are the most important... the Launching into Learning, yes, it's good for the mums, because we can mix and chat about things and all that and the kids, help them to socialise with other kids and learn to share, play and...really important part of a child's learning, starting, you know, from zero to five definitely...the teacher is amazing, kids get on with her great, you know, we have a different theme every week...a lot of effort goes in to it, which is really good, the kids enjoy it...we go on excursions...lot of variety – this way the mums can be involved as well. (Sarah, LiL parent)*

Participating parents' comments reflected their overall satisfaction and appreciation of the benefits they gained for themselves and their children and this was exemplified in Monika's comments. Monika appreciated the fact that her children had been given many social and learning experiences, which she expected would assist them throughout their lifetime:

*Thanks to the program my children have been able to experience many different things that we may not have had the opportunity to do had we not attended the sessions (Monika, LiL parent)*

Apart from acknowledging the benefits of ECEC programs, another theme, emerging from the discussions, was the importance parents placed on feeling comfortable when joining a new social group. The need to feel the right vibe is noted by Tiedens and Leach (2004) who state that, in new social settings other people generate emotional responses, which can be felt as either repelling or accepting.

#### **(b) Feeling comfortable and “fitting in”**

As well as endeavouring to improve parent-child engagements, the overall aim of both LiL and CFCs is to create a welcoming and easily accessed environment to ensure parents can feel comfortable and motivated to attend. As a community setting, CFCs provide social networking opportunities which many families found rewarding. Jack, for example, said he enjoyed the company of others at CFC and appreciated the resources available for himself and his grandson:

*I don't mind helping out...it's just like a little family...so recently being separated and whatever else, it's quite a nice little haven here actually...like if I want to talk about*

*my problems I can talk...there are a lot of families that are battling – I know myself, I've only just, as I said, I've recently separated and am on the single pension and have (my grandson) with me a couple of times a week. (Jack, CFC grandparent)*

Similarly, CFC parent, Sonja, appeared overjoyed at having a place to socialise and was enthusiastic about recently becoming a volunteer. The company of other parents and opportunity for her pre-school child to play in a safe environment fulfilled the lack of networks Sonja initially experienced as a newcomer to the area:

*Well, you can come in, you know, like with your family, the children go in and play. It's good you've got to supervise them but on occasions, such as Playgroup, well there's usually child carers in there, like provided in there – us mums can be sitting out here having a coffee and a chat while the kids are playing but it's good to socialise and, in all honesty, being here – in fact when I moved down here I didn't know anybody. I had no family down here... but I met a lot of good friends through this place....and then I became a volunteer here and yeah, no, it's worked out really good for me. (Sonja, CFC parent)*

This reciprocal feeling, of being able to fit in and feel welcomed within a new group, was also important to LiL parent, Nikki. Interestingly, Nikki's description of her first visit to the centre demonstrated how she was able to cope with the uncomfortable feeling of joining a new group; her approachable demeanour seemed to allow others to feel friendly towards her. Nikki demonstrated insight into her own feelings and was tuned in to other people's social cues and body language. Apart from being able to fit into a new social group, Nikki showed how she was mindful of her daughter's feelings and that her priority was for her child to be happy in the environment:

*When I was new, yes, everyone was really welcoming and they weren't afraid to come and talk to me, I didn't feel left out or on the side – it can be really daunting when you first come – you don't know people's attitudes or the way people are going to react and just from the first day it's always been comfortable and easy and fun and my daughter's always been really happy. (Nikki, LiL parent)*

Another parent, Lana, demonstrated how she relished the opportunity to attend CFC sessions with her pre-school child. She talked enthusiastically about how her older child had enjoyed

the CFC activities and was keen for her next child to experience the same benefits. Although families, living in the low SES areas, are reported (Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009) as suffering from higher rates of social exclusion, Lana did not seem to fit the mould. On the contrary, she appeared confident and socially competent, in knowing the kind of positive response she expected in a new social setting. As, Allman (2013) suggests, the families who are most likely to attend and benefit from inclusive programs are usually those who are already in possession of inclusion benefits; that is, they already know how to interpret social cues and respond to unfamiliar settings.

As this skill is crucial for adapting to new environments and being socially included, Watson et al. (2012) suggest that it is important to gain more understanding of why some people are better at identifying and regulating emotions in new social settings. Tiedens and Leach (2004) suggest that to fully understand emotions requires a knowledge that emotions do not really exist alone in the individual, but are triggered in response to social encounters. Rather than being an individual issue, emotions need to be understood as an expression of certain “display rules”, emanating from groups/situations and dictating either shared understanding or repulsion (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Thus, the emotionally pleasant feeling of a shared understanding makes fitting into a new group setting easy, but this ability requires sufficient levels of cultural capital (Nash (1990).

Nash (1990) describes Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital as mind and body dispositions, composed of relationship networks of mutual acquaintances and recognitions; that is, a convertible resource which can be mobilised for varying social encounters. It seems, therefore, that those with a certain degree of social/cultural capital are in a much better position to negotiate various social situations. All the parents, involved in this study, demonstrated high levels of social and cultural capital, exemplified in the way they were able to confidently seek suitable social groups and gain benefits and support from LiL and CFC programs.

While all ECEC services aim is to facilitate social inclusion; that is, to reduce disadvantage by increasing social, economic and civic participation for families (DEEWR, 2009), the issue of social inclusion is more complex. Unlike economic poverty, social exclusion is more about lacks of connectedness and a consequential disinclination to participate in social pursuits (Caruana & McDonald, 2011). The crucial issue is that, for social exclusion to be reduced and connectedness to be promoted, people must choose to participate in support programs in order to gain these social inclusion benefits.



Both LiL and CFCs adhere to the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) guidelines which are based on evidence correlating early learning with improved post-school outcomes, particularly inclusion in the workplace. In following the guidelines, LiL and CFC programs place emphasis on ensuring parent-child interaction, albeit within a play group setting. In recent times, however, new practices are focusing more on purposeful parent-child engagement and this change has met with mixed reactions from three parents in the LiL setting.

### **(c) Program strategies**

Strategies have changed, especially in LiL programs, which are now directed towards educating parents to accept the need to enhance their child's language and fine motor skills, through parent-child interactions. Over recent years, parents have noticed that these changes seemed to have created unintended consequences. One parent, Monika, expressed a preference for the previous play group style which allowed parents and children to learn social behaviours in a more natural way:

*A shift has also been made to emphasise the parent/carer being beside the child while they learn...as parents, we are our children's first teacher and, while we understand and accept that this is a learning environment, our children want to be able to learn while they are playing and the parents need the chance to have a chat with the other parents. Even, as parents, we are still learning and one of the best ways for us to learn is to hear others talking about their own experiences. (Monika, LiL parent)*

Three LiL parents, involved in this research study, specifically expressed a preference for the more relaxed atmosphere of the play group, because they felt that they learned more from other parents, just as their children learn from play. Monika described how the natural play had become formalised to focus on parent-child interaction, which she believed not only decreased the natural flow but felt disruptive rather than connected:

*The "play" has been replaced with "learn" and some of the children and parents aren't happy with this shift. One example of a particular change that has been happening....shift from the children being encouraged to sit on the mat...for a couple of songs and a story, read to them, to now being one-on-one story time between parent/carer and child. Although a more structured program has been put in place, there is no flow to the sessions and we find that the children are shifted from one activity to another without any "bridge" between them. (Monika, LiL parent)*

One parent, Miriam, suggested that teachers' explanations of the reasons behind the new approaches seemed unnecessary. She noted that, while teachers were explaining, parents were looking bored and children were moving away. Miriam observed parents being annoyed with the changes, because it gave them little time to finish activities before starting another. Although she was aware that teachers needed to explain the purpose behind activities, the set tasks seemed more difficult to implement in actual practice. Miriam commented that other parents also said they would prefer the more relaxed atmosphere:

*The little kids get bored and walk away. Parents are not really interested in the “ins and outs”. Some parents get annoyed with the change; that is, from play group to structured LiL where they have to be involved with their child. (Miriam, LiL parent)*

*The structuring...go into play group and do one thing and then five minutes later you've got to do something else and then five minutes later the kids will have to go and pack all that up. It needs to be a little bit more relaxed, I think rather than “here, there, go, no, got to do something else, finish this up”. You can tell that that's what they've (teacher) been taught – they've got a list of the criteria of what they've got to do each day and tick off. (Miriam, LiL parent)*

*The little kids, you know, they don't have that much of an attention span and they'll be starting to do something and be really in to it, like the craft - “Oh, no, you've got to pack that up. We're going to the hall to do motor skills”...everything crammed into today, sort of. It's too much...a lot of the parents ask about that, because they don't like to have to move their kids from place to place, especially when there's more than one (child). (Tess and Miriam, LiL parents)*

Miriam observed that parents, after becoming accustomed to certain familiar practices, were finding the changed program structure disruptive. Although they understood the importance of parent-child interactions, parents felt that there was no flow with the new system. The feedback from other parents, according to Miriam and Monika, was that they seemed to prefer a less structured approach:

*... problems getting the mums to participate...because they sort of changed it...before it was a mum's group...where you did go and the kids did sort of craft and parents got*

*together but you do talk about parenting issues...it's not all just gossip and that...learn a lot from other parents – and then all of a sudden it just went to the Launching into Learning which is more structured, getting them ready for school rather than play...I think some of the parents kind of went “Well, I don't come here for that”. (Tess and Miriam, LiL parents)*

Nevertheless, parents who regularly participated in programs appeared confident and able to make choices based on their own needs. Among residents of designated low SES areas, there are people who experience varied levels of disadvantage, Nash (1990) explains. While many families in these areas may be socially isolated and disempowered, this research study found some parents with a sense of entitlement who expected a certain standard of support. These parents were, in fact, discerning in their choice of ECEC programs and sought venues which suited their requirements.

#### **(d) Parents' choice**

For instance, LiL parent, Nikki, described how she made the choice to find an alternative program after having concerns for her baby's safety at the first centre she attended. Nikki's actions demonstrated that she was capable of making decisions to get her desired outcome. Her behaviour also reflected practitioners' observations and Watson's (2009) findings that most participating parents seem to possess a certain degree of self-efficacy. Nikki described “shopping around” for the services that met with her required standards and appeared quite unprepared to tolerate anything that would put her baby's safety at risk:

*When my daughter was only a baby still, they used to have the big kids come in push bikes and ride around the baby's heads and stuff – there was no, yes, there was no sense of safety or direction. (Nikki, LiL parent)*

Another parent, Miriam, said that she has noticed how some families seem to be able take control and choose the programs they liked best:

*There're a few different LiL programs in this area... usually shop around until you find one that you're comfortable with, people that you like, and because you do spend an awful lot of your time there, if you go to all the LiL sessions...you want to get along with the mums that are there. (Miriam, LiL parent)*

Choice is sometimes influenced by incentives and Miriam recalled that, in the early days, free school uniforms were offered to families to encourage regular attendance in the LiL sessions. Participating parents said they were initially swayed by the offer of free uniforms and that this motivated them to keep attending upon getting to know other parents and the teachers. In regards to non-attending families, most regularly-attending parents seemed to perceive them as being dis-interested in the overall benefits of the programs.

#### **(e) Non-participating families**

As Allman suggests (2013), contemporary thinking is that all people have a social right to equal opportunities. When freely available support programs are accessible and non-participation still occurs, this may be attributable to either external or internal barriers. External obstacles can be in the form of transport, language, disabilities, venue suitability, teaching style and program structure, whereas internal issues may relate to feelings of social alienation. The latter elicit less sympathy, Allman (2013) suggests, because this group appears to purposely reject any opportunities to improve. On the contrary, people seem to be judged less if they are perceived to be more legitimately disadvantaged and suffering difficulties related to transport, language or physical disability barriers (Allman, 2013).

External issues, such as venue suitability and teaching quality, can impact on attendance and LiL parent, Miriam, related her observations to explain why some families might have discontinued attendance:

*Some of the reasons that some families are no longer attending sessions include the current room, where LiL is held, being inadequate in size to cater for the number of families...teacher does not engage with the children as easily as the previous ones have done and the lack of flow during the session. (Miriam, LiL parent)*

Other external issues, however, did not seem to deter attendance for some families. The prevalence of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families, for instance, in one LiL program, provided evidence that language barriers were not an obstacle. Not only were these families enjoying the programs, Miriam noted that the non-English speaking and other special-needs families appeared to be getting the most attention:

*The teacher focuses her time and attention on non-English speaking families and making a point of spending one-on-one time with these children and she doesn't*

*spend the same time with the English speaking children/parents...this has caused friction with some families as they don't receive equal attention.* (Miriam, LiL parent)

Rather than external barriers, LiL parents, Tess and Miriam, perceived the problem as relating more to parents' fears of socialising or disinterest in doing something for their children's benefit. Tess and Miriam said that they observed many parents who, although unable to speak English or painfully shy, were still able to make an effort to attend. These parents seemed motivated to attend ECEC programs simply for the sake of their children:

*People...have come and got scared and didn't come back...feel uncomfortable going there...but people that do go... yes, and there's also the Butanese women...they can't speak a word of English but they're still happy to go...for their children...there's still people who go there, who you probably don't even speak to or they don't speak, but they still go there for their children ... yes, go there for the kids... that's the thing, for their children.* (Tess and Miriam, LiL parents)

LiL parents, Miriam, Tess and Monika, noticed that the problem of non-attendance appeared to coincide more with family practices than with external issues. Family habits, which are perceived as non-compliant and socially unacceptable, tend to be rejected by the mainstream (Allman, 2013). It was apparent, when talking to participating parents, Miriam, Tess and Monika, that non-participating families' behaviours were seen as deliberate laziness tendencies, which removed them from social inclusion opportunities. Families who showed disinterest in social inclusion values could, therefore, be inadvertently repelled by regular-attending parents:

*Some just can't be bothered. They just sit their kids in front of the telly and do their own thing... they're happy with their life...there are some parents who don't do any of these things. They're the same parents who, when the kids are in school they don't bother sending healthy lunches...they don't do reading...the kids aren't dressed, you know, properly half of the time...they're just not interested in anything that's going to further their kids...don't think it's important that, you know, to know anything, it's just getting rid of the kids.* (Miriam, Tess and Monika, LiL parents)

Although families, who appear not to make any effort, are often pilloried, Bowlby (1988) suggests that a lack of order and ability to plan, in adulthood, can be attributed to emotional

regulation and self-control problems, which are related to one's early parenting experiences. While no causal link, between disorganised adult behaviours and attachment experience, is sought in this research thesis, sociological theory explains that social behaviours are more spontaneous than intentional (Bourdieu, 1990a).

The lack of tolerance, shown by the more socially inclusive parents towards those who do not participate, is perhaps a reflection of the way socially disordered groups are perceived as a threat to civility (Allman, 2013). These divisions, between the status of social deprivation and social entitlement have existed throughout history. Nevertheless, early childhood and family support programs, such as LiL and CFC have been implemented in order to address these social inequalities and injustices. The purpose of these programs is to strengthen social inclusion especially for families who most need support.

## CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 has described the main issues derived from the interviews with practitioners and parents who participated in this study. Upon organising the interview data, some major themes arose for both practitioners and parents. Commonly cited was the need to create awareness of the benefits in attending LiL and CFC programs and to provide a relaxed atmosphere to ensure families are inclined to participate. Both practitioners and parents mentioned the issue of the structured approach, often favoured in the LiL programs, as opposed to the more relaxed, "soft-entry" of CFCs. One teacher, Julie, suggested that the most important issue was for families to want to attend and, therefore, programs needed to be implemented in an interesting, sometimes impromptu, manner. Parents, like Miriam, Tess and Monika agreed that they preferred a more relaxed setting where they could socialise and their children could learn through play.

This chapter has highlighted the challenges of considering the needs of different groups when facilitating social inclusion within ECEC programs. Groups, such as teenage mothers, single fathers, new parents, non-English speaking families and those involved in Child Protection all seemed to need special attention. The most challenging issue, however, seemed to be in finding ways to recruit the families who were the most at risk of social isolation. Education leader, John, demonstrated a deep understanding of the families in his community but expressed concern that policies were not in tune with the issues facing the people they were purporting to assist. He noted that non-engaged families did care about their children but in a different way.

Parents, Miriam, Tess and Monika have not observed any discrimination towards families with disabilities or from ethnically diverse cultures but suggested that the main issue was whether parents were sufficiently motivated to become involved in programs for their children's sake. LiL teacher, Helen, was surprised that some families were not in the habit of net-working and enlisting their friends to attend programs, whereas others seemed to be well-connected with strong friendships. Jane expressed reservations about knocking on doors and trying to recruit families who were reluctant to attend programs. The main issue for Tracey was her observations of passive parenting; that is, some parents did not seem empowered to assert and provide boundaries for their children. A similar observation was made by LiL teacher, Julie, who was passionate about addressing the need to assist many parents with parenting skills.

The challenge of being able to truly understand some of the challenges faced by social isolated families was discussed by LiL teachers, Jane, Helen and Julie. While not denying the qualifications and skill level of LiL and CFC practitioners, they noted that it was more a matter of them "getting" what was going on and understanding the signs of social and emotional difficulties in parents and children.

The next chapter draws on the interviews with practitioners and parents to describe some social behaviour which appeared to be emotionally-based, and concludes with their recommendations on ways to improve services.

## CHAPTER 6 – DATA ON EMOTIONS

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In this chapter, practitioners and parents discussed their experiences and observations of emotionally-based social behaviours within LiL and CFC programs. These accounts were examined in consideration of the research question which asks how understandings of social inclusion are implicit in ECEC approaches, to facilitate social inclusion for families with pre-school children. Practitioner and parent accounts were categorised into common themes and analysed in conjunction with theories to explain how emotional influences may drive social behaviour and determine how, and whether, social inclusion benefits may be attained.

Although the concept of social inclusion originated from social exclusion terminology in France, various interpretations in Commonwealth countries, such as Australia, subscribe to the idea that social exclusion refers to those groups who are marginalised from mainstream opportunities (Allman, 2013). Diverse ideas have led to the contemporary understanding of social inclusion in terms of its opposite, social exclusion, which has come to imply the unrealised social rights for those suffering barriers in accessing benefits. This chapter examines social inclusion/exclusion as an emotional issue, relating to the way people feel and react when faced with certain social circumstances.

The ideas of Tiedens and Leach (2004) and, particularly TenHouten (2007), feature strongly in this chapter. They suggest that sociological study cannot concentrate solely on cognitions and omit the influences of emotions when examining patterns of human behaviour. The notion that emotions cannot be separated from the social world is highly important in providing a link with earlier chapters, which explain how emotional affect impacts on social relationships (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). The focus of this thesis is to emphasise how a concentration on cognition may downplay the stronger motivating force of emotions, which, as this thesis proposes, exert a major influence on a person's social behaviour and cognition of their social world.

Emotional feelings have a major influence on social behaviours. For example, although temporal, the feeling of anxiety relates to a fearful response arising in anticipation of a negative prospect. This situation occurs if people have previously felt uncomfortable or embarrassed in certain settings and their memories trigger anxiety upon returning to the same



or a similar scene (TenHouten, 2007). Resembling a classically conditioned response, the need to avoid negative feelings is associated with prior painful experiences. The issue of emotions, as a strong influence on social behaviours, is examined through the lens of sociology, in conjunction with practitioners' and parents' accounts of their experiences and observations in LiL and CFC social inclusion programs.

## 6.1 EMOTIONAL INFLUENCES ON PARTICIPATION

### *6.1.1 Practitioner and Parent Perspectives on Emotions*

The following are the most often-repeated descriptions, drawn from the practitioner interviews and parent discussions, which demonstrate some emotional aspects associated with participation in LiL and CFC programs.

- (a) Uncomfortable feelings
- (b) Fear of institutional environments
- (c) Anxiety about children's behaviours
- (d) Emotions expressed in body language
- (e) Fear of attending programs alone
- (f) Lost trust

#### **(a) Uncomfortable feelings**

Feelings are linked to emotions and relate to evaluations of pleasantness and agreeability (TenHouten, 2007). Two education leaders, June and Mary, observed that parents who are able to feel comfortable in most social gatherings would find participation in ECEC programs equally as agreeable. Such parents would usually look for any programs and activities with which to enhance their children's educational and social life success. Consequently, most participating parents appeared confident and happy when interacting with their children and connecting with other parents:

*(Participating parents) will access many, many programs...so their children (will be) ready for school. (June, leader)*

*Those who engage are overwhelmingly positive, just like glowing in every way...gaining their lovely joyous feelings with their children, learning and on the same journey together, but they also connect with the other parents...making their own friends. (Mary, leader)*

Conversely, families who seem less keen to attend, may associate unpleasant emotional feelings with certain social settings, which TenHouten (2007) suggests may be in response to problematic prior experiences in other similar social encounters. Education leader, June, noticed that some parents exhibited signs of insecurity in not knowing how to act:

*That social insecurity, just not feeling confident about who(m) they're going to be sitting with or anyone involved in the program. (June, leader)*

To address this issue, Watson et al. (2012) call for more knowledge in understanding why some people are better at identifying and regulating emotions, as this skill is crucial for them to adapt to new environments and become socially included. Understanding the problem of non-participation requires knowing that emotions do not really exist alone in the individual but are triggered in response to social encounters (Tiedens & Leach, 2004).

Bowlby (1988) adds that symptoms of a lack of early social skill ability are more noticeable during transitions, such as entering into new environments where social relationship skills are put under stress. The main feature of good social relationship skills is an ability to calm emotions and interpret social cues (Ladd et al., 2006), without which participation in new social settings may be highly stressful.

Early learning leaders observed that emotional issues presented barriers for participation. They saw some parents and children exhibiting apprehension around their inability to socially interact. June noticed, for example, that feelings of insecurity arose in parents and children who appeared unable to contain fearful emotions, and this was a major factor impinging on whether these families would return to early learning sessions after their initial visit.

*The number one concern...they haven't got that security feeling coming in here, through the door or working with the group...they won't be there again next week and... even the child...having that self-regulation, their emotional regulation...to me that's really important (June, leader)*

Emotional regulation abilities are crucial in being able to adapt to new environments (Watson et al., 2012). As the theoretical framework of this thesis outlines, people need to acquire emotional regulation skills during infancy in order to be able to attain social inclusion and educational wellbeing in adulthood (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2011).

In acknowledging this need to ensure future social wellbeing, LiL and CFCs now focus on children's emotional regulation skill development. One strategy practitioners used to help children learn to manage their emotions was to encourage parents to play with their children while being mindful of allowing children to express and regulate their emotions.

*A lot of home play - dramatic role play opportunities - so that children are starting to develop these social play skills and social and emotional regulation...just being able to...express themselves* (Mary, leader)

Onchwari and Keengwe (2011) suggest that educators and parents need to be able to teach children to self-manage their emotions, especially at the times when they display behaviours contrary to societal norms. This focus on instructing a child to behave socially, appropriately, reflects the psychological idea that emotions are the individual's personal response to social events (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Based on this thinking, it can be assumed that norms and moral values can be learned at school and, therefore, children can be taught to regulate emotions. Tiedens and Leach (2004) argue that emotional regulation cannot be taught, because emotions are not internal states, separate from the social world.

Nevertheless, Gordon and Browne (2011) suggest that teachers can help children with emotional regulation. With ECEC settings, practitioners can also encourage parents to show their children how to behave in the school environment:

*being observant adults...you can discuss with parents about...how your child is regulating themselves and maybe you can catch them while they're there and...show them ways...simple things that we expect at school (which may be) not common practice for the kids who are coming in.* (Mary, leader)

Practitioners, such as LiL teacher, Jane, observed how some children exhibit antisocial behaviours in the way they responded to other children in the programs. Jane believed that, by the age of two, a child should be learning social reciprocity and negotiating skills.

*I mean, at a two and three year old level...not able to share and (they) use physical behaviour rather than use words* (Jane, LiL teacher)

Intervening when children were behaving in a non-social way requires diplomacy skills on the part of practitioners. Tess, pointed out that there was a need to avoid being too directive with parents when encouraging more socially acceptable behaviours in their children:

*(Parents) dislike being told what to do, feel humiliated, arc up, because they feel they're being directed into certain behaviours. (Tess, LiL parent)*

When a person is told to how to behave they can feel negatively evaluated by others and this embarrassment affects self-esteem (TenHouten, 2007). Being publicly judged leads to embarrassment, which involves a loss of face, but this situation can be remedied if the sufferer corrects their behaviour, offers an excuse or withdraws from the situation (TenHouten, 2007). Embarrassment is felt when one is unsuccessful in presenting the “desired self” in social situations and LiL parent, Miriam, remarked that these feelings were not pleasant:

*I think parents don't like being told to do things...they don't like that, it's like saying that you're not doing a good job, like you should be interacting with your child and people take offence to it. (Miriam, LiL parent)*

Early childhood practitioner, Tracey, agreed that it was unhelpful to make parents feel that their behaviour may be deficient. She preferred to suggest some helpful programs, for parents to attend, rather than directly offering suggestions on changing their parenting styles:

*When I see a parent is struggling I suggest programs, such as Triple P, to offer the tools for empowerment rather than make the parent feel inadequate. (Tracey, CFC worker)*

While being negatively evaluated can be embarrassing, it is much worse if a person already has negative feelings, because the embarrassment can become shame which is a deeper, more lasting emotion (TenHouten, 2007). When embarrassment occurs, it can be quickly remedied and does not necessarily cause shame. Shame, however, involves an element of self-blame and exerts a strong desire to escape the shameful situation. The desire to flee occurs when a person feels singled out and rejected, especially when there is no-one present to provide support and security. The shamed person will usually choose to disassociate from the situation which has elicited these strong negative emotions (TenHouten, 2007).

James, an inclusion worker, observed some parents' negative emotions in situations where they may be told how to behave or asked to do something in front of the group. James saw signs of embarrassment if they were expected to engage actively in a group situation.

*It can be more confrontational - particularly if their literacy skills...communication skills or their confidence within a group context isn't very high - it's difficult for them to engage if they don't want to be the person who has to talk...just sit there and be happy to listen but not...participate in the group. (James, CFC worker)*

Fear can arise if a person is placed in a situation similar to a previous one in which they felt inadequate, and which triggers the memory of the prior incident (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Emotional feelings, associated with prior unpleasant feelings, can arise even though the previously unpleasant environment may have changed and become more welcoming and inclusive. Emotions are the way people imbue meaning, based on their experiences of the world and, therefore, a person's social experiences and behaviours relate directly to their emotions, which are triggered by memories (Tiedens & Leach, 2004).

Rather than being separate from the social world, emotions are dependent on a social configuration to trigger and formulate them (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). In other words, emotions, rather than being a separate entity within the individual, are connected and contingent on the perceived expectations of other people's responses, and are based on prior memories of similar social encounters.

#### **(b) Fear of institutional environments**

Education leader, Mary, explained that practitioners were aware of some people who appeared to have an emotionally unpleasant association with school environments. In the knowledge of this potential deterrent, they organised programs in settings which did not resemble a school:

*Some schools run sessions...in a venue that's not a school, so the people (who are) frightened of coming to the school might come to a different place. (Mary, leader)*

The focus on creating an atmosphere, unlike the school environment, was paramount for CFCs and community inclusion worker, Vanessa, emphasised the importance of creating a welcoming, non-threatening environment, because:

*...sometimes the parents...have had previous issues around their own fear of schools or negative experiences. (Vanessa, CFC worker)*

Another CFC worker, Helen, suggested that some parents were not accessing services, because of their negative experiences with institutions of all kinds. Helen specifically referred to families who had been involved with Child Protection agencies and who were averse to dealing with any environment resembling an institution. Consequently, she was aware that many families, who might be in need of high degrees of support, were not gaining the wide range of ECEC and community integrated assistance that was available for them:

*My biggest concern, the biggest issue for me, is people (who) all community services know (who) have high needs in their family. So, it might be that they've had Child Protection issues in the past and that they obviously need major support networks around them. They're often people we don't get anywhere near, because they're fearful of services.* (Helen, CFC worker)

The reason why people may not be inclined to access much-needed supports and assistance is usually because of adverse prior encounters (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Paradoxically, although most people experience a need to feel connected, the opposing need to avoid rejection and humiliation can intensify feelings of exclusion. People display avoidant social behaviours because of anxieties, which are created directly from the human need for belonging (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). These avoidant behaviours are mostly not evident until triggered by a stressful event (Bowlby, 1979). Shame is an emotion, which can be aroused when social bonds become under threat. Avoiding shame and embarrassment, therefore, involves preventing other people's devaluation, and this can invoke feelings of rejection. Consequently, the need to connect and belong can be overtaken by the fear of being rejected and/or humiliated, because the stronger emotional urge is to avoid a threatening environment. Ironically, this counter-productive survival mechanism can cause a person to flee the chance of becoming socially included and connected, because their foremost need is to avoid the risk of feeling rejected.

Practitioners noted how some parents, in trying to avoid scrutiny, will stay quiet in new social situations in an attempt to keep a low profile. Unfortunately, their very young children's uninhibited behaviours sometimes spoil the charade.

### **(c) Anxiety about children's behaviours**

LiL teachers, Sue and Julie and CFC practitioner, Vanessa, related how they observed children's disruptive behaviours being a source of emotional anxiety for parents, causing

them embarrassment when attending programs. In these situations, practitioners, such as Julie, focussed on preventing parents from feeling ashamed about their children's behaviours. She was astounded at the many parents, from varying backgrounds, who were unable to discipline their children and who struggled emotionally as a consequence. Julie saw many parents who appeared unable to take control and assert themselves, and that this affected their wellbeing and their child's ability to cope within a social setting. Often parents showed feelings of being ashamed when they were unable to control their child and, with this in mind, Julie's sessions placed importance on assuring parents that they need not feel inadequate:

*Often parents who have difficulties with children will not attend anything and their child's behaviour is only evident when they start school. CFC is about the intervention happening before the children start school...it only takes a week to train a child... teaching parents to take control. Parents need to be reassured...no such thing as a perfect parent. (Raelene, Tracey, CFC workers and Julie, LiL teacher)*

Other practitioners, LiL teacher, Sue and CFC worker, Vanessa, observed how some parents were always watching their children and seemed worried that they may do something wrong. Some parents were constantly vigilant of the children to avoid being embarrassed by their behaviours. Parents' anxiety was reflected in their constant checking of their children. In these circumstances, Sue spoke of how she made an effort to placate parents by encouraging them to discipline their child using tone of voice. She wanted parents to realise that children are not always being naughty but simply learning about things around them:

*Like...most particularly when the dad was here it's "don't touch that, don't go near that, come here, do that". So they're very nervous... that's their parenting – they don't want their children to get into everything and do things...so learning to understand you need to start disciplining and use your voice for discipline. (Sue, LiL teacher)*

Julie also emphasised that the parent's tone of voice was the most important training tool:

*Before language, the child can hear your tone of voice - tone of voice is everything. You never have to raise your voice. (Julie, LiL teacher)*

Nevertheless, parents often appeared anxious about their children's behaviours, as CFC worker, Vanessa observed:

*If parents are feeling that the children's behaviour is a challenge – it is exhausting having to monitor that behaviour and check with the children all the time...doesn't happen very often but it has been known to happen...in that situation we would be inclined to intervene and to support that parent.* (Vanessa, CFC worker)

Workers at another CFC setting described how they focussed on ensuring the new parents felt included. They did this by enlisting the support of regular parents, who were asked to make an extra effort to include new parents in the group. The onus was, however, on the practitioners, who were trained to avoid appearing patronising and to focus on giving parents the chance to gain more confidence:

*...talk to regulars to make sure they're welcoming - otherwise families feel socially isolated - it is more about the staff taking on the role to make sure the new family is welcomed, because they have done Family Partnership Training, which is about being an active listener and with a strong focus on being the helper rather than the expert, empowering parents to find solutions.* (Tracey, Raelene and Nellie, CFC workers and Julie, LiL teacher)

#### **(d) Emotions expressed in body language**

While practitioners and parents were aware of how to talk to new parents in an inclusive, self-empowering manner, the stronger influence of body language messages could surpass the verbal encouragement. Body language signals relate to feelings elicited from other people's implicit understandings (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). It can be daunting, therefore, to enter a new group situation, because of the way other people generate emotional responses, which can indicate whether shared understandings are felt within the group. No matter what is said, emotional stimuli trigger feeling state reactions which are “revealed in facial expression, posture, gesture, specific behaviours and conversation” (TenHouten, 2007, p. 4).

While confident people have a strong foundation of self-acceptance and a high degree of self-worth beliefs, people with low self-esteem are more sensitive to threats of rejection, because they have a much higher need for approval. Acceptance and its opposite, rejection, involve a person's sense of identity and, therefore, those with early childhood-related low self-esteem have an increased need to be accepted, because of their intense fear of rejection (TenHouten, 2007). The fear of being rejected can, therefore, invoke a response in another person to accommodate that expectation. The feeling of expecting rejection and eliciting this



expectation from others may cause a person to withdraw socially to avoid being subjected to potential negative feelings. As the theoretical framework of this thesis explains, negative affect impacts on social relationships, because it seems to involve an element of self-exclusion (TenHouten, 2007). Similarly, exclusion can also be felt from another person in relation to territorial encroachment. For the purpose of this research study, TenHouten's (2007) and Bowlby's (1973, 1982) explanations, of the way emotional responses occur, can be useful to explain why some families may be disinclined to attend the very programs which would be of benefit to them and their children. The observations of practitioners and parents revealed how emotional issues impacted on some people's desire to engage in LiL and CFC social inclusion support programs.

Early learning leader, June, noted how some individuals, or groups, took ownership of the space, making it difficult for new people to fit in. June observed the body language when a new person arrived, especially from those parents who were well-established in the group. The newcomer was observed as sensing the unwelcoming "vibe" of non-acceptance emanating from the more dominant, established parents:

*When someone comes in, they just kind of feel they're being judged and not accepted and looked up and down and "this is **my** room" – is a feeling that the other parents have got control... if the new person comes in and gets the vibes and they don't feel too welcome. (June, leader)*

Symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990b) relates to disapproving looks and body language, which has an effect on the person for whom these signals are directed. Notions of power and territory are felt in terms of hierarchy (TenHouten, 2007). Hierarchy denotes the level of power and authority in social situations, with territoriality referring to an established space where a person feels a sense of comfort and belonging. Ultimately, these orientations appear to exist as intangible emotional feelings relating to social inclusion/exclusion (TenHouten, 2007).

On the subject of territoriality, CFC worker, James also observed how regular family groups took ownerships of their space and would dictate who would be welcomed in the established group. James observed the reactions, elicited from the body language of established parents when someone new arrived, especially if their child's behaviour was not perceived as acceptable by the group:

*You'll see, watching others, to see what other's response (is)...if someone else's child was to, say push something over or push another child, you know, so there's all that sort of aspect going on constantly...it's a natural reaction... "I'm not welcome". Even though it hasn't been direct, it's just - and they never come back...so many levels, not just in practice but, yes, body language, understanding....so many things.*  
(James, CFC worker)

Education leader, Bridget, also saw evidence of the power of body language elicited from some people in the established group when a new person came into the space:

*The cooking group...been operating for twelve months and it's such an established group of people and they do some great stuff but when you have a new person, who wants to join, it's almost like you see...it's like there's a standoffishness, there's a level of suspicion about you wanting to join "our group", because it's already established and yes and if the person, who wants to be a part of it, isn't really resilient I think they'd struggle and probably not come back.* (Bridget, leader)

This power of territoriality appeared to remain even though the teachers and facilitators were welcoming and focussed on inclusive practices. Bridget's observations led her to suspect that social inclusion and exclusion related to feelings:

*Even though we are incredibly inclusive but there's still that sense...it's just an inward feeling and it's, yes, they, those people; they almost have an ownership of it.* (Bridget, leader)

Inward feelings of trepidation are common to most people when having to start up a conversation with unknown people, especially in unfamiliar social settings. These feelings appear more intense, though, for those who are highly sensitive to body language, as was evident below in the vignette by Helen, a LiL teacher:

*Some people that - you get a sense of the - even though they take that step to come in, that they find it very hard to go out of themselves, to make that next step to say "Hello" to someone.* (Helen, LiL teacher)

Helen noticed that some people seemed unaware of the impact of their own body language messages:

*I even notice it sometimes when I've introduced a new mum to some other mothers and the new mum might have, immediately, after we've been introduced, turned her back – so there are interesting things like that, that you notice in the body language.*  
(Helen, LiL teacher)

By turning her back, the signal of rejection was blatantly clear. Although the parent may not have been consciously aware of her reaction, she still conveyed a message which resulted in other people responding accordingly:

*That then says to the other mothers, you've introduced her to in a way "Well, maybe I'm not interested in you". Yes, so she may not know that she's doing that and it's creating a more difficult place for her to make friends.* (Helen, LiL teacher)

Bridget observed how some families had great difficulties in feeling comfortable in social settings and that this seemed to be related to their feelings of anxiety and depression:

*I don't know if they actually verbalise it but some of them don't see a purpose, some of them have their own social issues which impact, like depression, anxiety, those things, so that impacts on their capacity to feel comfortable in a big group setting...mixing, can't be with other people...people with anxiety around being with other people just don't feel comfortable so they don't come and that impacts on the children.* (Bridget, leader)

Emotional issues are not only about anxiety and depression but also the opposites, resentment and aggression. Emotions consist of opposites; for example, feelings of anger and fear are both similar and different. The principle of antithesis states that, while associated habits can evoke an emotional state of mind, a contrary state of mind can involuntarily induce a different reaction (TenHouten, 2007). Although a two-sided sword, neither passive nor aggressive states are socially inclusive. Both aggressive and withdrawn behaviours are connected (Bowlby, 1988). The feeling of fear, accompanied by a defensive stance, is a behaviour practitioners observed in some families.

Feeling states, accompanied by a negative association with a certain person, were noted by education leader Mary, when she heard parents state their reasons for not wanting to participate in programs:

*“I’m not coming to that group ‘cause she’s there” but take her out and two or three others will come in. (Mary, leader)*

Those who were able to evoke an emotional response in another, by causing them to stay away from the scene, were described as dominant, because they seemed able to exert authority over others. Mary referred to this type of person as the “Queen Bee”:

*The “Queen Bee” one will stop the others from doing anything that they may want to do. (Mary, leader)*

Jane observed that in the LiL setting of a small community, some parents seemed to feel real apprehension about coming into contact with certain people. She observed that parents’ fears often related to legitimate reasons for not wishing to associate with someone known to them:

*It is quite clearly about fear. One young girl refuses to come to the centre or to Launching into Learning in case the uncle of (her child’s) father is about. (Jane, LiL teacher)*

To enhance wellbeing, humans are oriented to group-living through social relationships, but they also need to ensure their safety; the latter requires a certain amount of risk assessment (TenHouten, 2007). Ultimately, it remains a universal problem of life, for all organisms, to establish a safe nourishing place in which to live.

Fear and anxiety, associated with certain public places can, therefore, make some people want to move away to avoid a perceived threatening environment. This can occur even when the environment no longer poses a threat. Inclusion worker, James, noticed that there were many families who, although living in close proximity to the CFCs, preferred to remain in their secure group; they seemed disinclined to venture outside their own restricted familial areas. James observed that, if that familiarity feeling was not readily replicated in an unfamiliar setting, it deterred some people from attending:

*They appear fearful of unfamiliar environments...of what’s out there in the wide society and for them to step from their house...it throws them completely, because they know their house is where they feel safe and comfortable and familiar with...this unfamiliar environment (CFCs), as welcoming and as safe and as, you know, as happy and fun as you can make it, they still don’t tend to come and it’s really amazing. (James, CFC worker)*

The issue of social inclusion, in being able to extend one's network beyond the first degree family, depends on the earliest foundation of social experience (TenHouten, 2007). Those who have experienced a positive early familial experience are better equipped for integration into the wider world, because of their secure early socialisation experience. An early positive experience, therefore, portends a resourceful, confident and autonomous adulthood. Parents' lack of autonomy was a characteristic noted by all CFC practitioners in this research study. They observed many incidents of parents who seemed anxious in attending activities and excursions without a companion.

#### **(e) Fear of attending programs alone**

Being fearful and anxious of new and unknown experiences is understandable, and useful in making risk assessments (TenHouten, 2007). Anxiety, however, is sometimes based on a sense of potential failure, which can thwart the possibility of integrating socially and benefiting from new social connections. Emotions arise because of an expectation of a perceived fearful event. A certain degree of natural anxiety is rational for problem solving, but when it relates to feelings of personal inadequacy, this can impinge on the ability to make decisions (TenHouten, 2007).

All sixteen practitioners observed behaviours indicative of social anxiety in some parents. Although parents appeared to realise their need to attend programs, for their children's sake, the actual process of walking through the door often provoked anxiety. Some parents' anxiety seemed to occur when they became unsure of how to behave. Practitioners observed that uncomfortable feelings ultimately deterred many parents from continuing to attend. Those who appeared to lack basic skills or intuition, in knowing how to behave in unfamiliar terrain, appeared to feel isolated and tended to just slip away unnoticed:

*Some parents don't want to handle it either, not sure how to go about it ... back off because they don't have the skills... and you'll even see some mums come in knowing that they need ...to get their kids ready for school, they're not comfortable going but they know, "This is what I should be doing, this is my job as a mother", so they'll come in through and ... just quietly go around and sit up the other end and not make any attempts (then) they might disappear and you haven't even seen them go. (June, leader)*

To help parents who were nervous about embarking on new ventures, the CFC's "buddy" mentoring system was implemented to recruit the more confident and caring parents to help new parents feel more relaxed in the group. A volunteer CFC parent, Sonja, related how she was often called upon to assist with the new parents. Sonja recalled a situation, involving a parent who was anxious about joining the "Learn to Swim" program alone. As Sonja enjoyed being a volunteer, she was happy to help other parents gain confidence and become motivated and involved in the activities organised through CFC programs:

*Well, yeah, I had one of the mothers ringing me, "Are you going to that pool, please tell me you're going. I'm so stressed out". I said, "Stop stressing" ...she said "I was just hoping you were coming" ...Yes, I had a lot of phone calls, "Are you coming?" ... Soon as she found out that I was coming she wasn't so bad. (Sonja, CFC volunteer parent)*

Although the peer mentoring volunteers were very helpful in making parents feel more comfortable, there were pitfalls, as education leader Penny remarked. Penny emphasised that parents, who assisted as peer mentors with vulnerable families, needed to be able to recognise the limits of their role. As many families had complex issues, peer mentors needed to understand how to maintain boundaries:

*When we were running a program...trying to develop peer mentors so the parents would then be able to support other parents to come along – it can work very well. It can be, of course, very time intensive because that person also needs lots of support and guidance in the boundaries of their role...it's not all smooth sailing. It can create problems too if people don't quite really understand their boundaries very clearly...it's a great idea but it's very intensive as well, very sensitive. (Penny, leader)*

While many practical issues prevailed, practitioners observed a core problem with socially excluded people: that is, that they appeared to lack basic trust of other people. Practitioners observed that trust was a major issue needing to be established immediately, in order to encourage families to engage in the programs and continue regular participation.

#### **(f) Lost trust**

Misanthropy generally refers to a negative expectation of communal relationships and this expectation, developing from the earliest time in childhood, causally influences the whole

spectrum of emotions and orientation to the world (TenHouten, 2007; Bowlby, 1988).

Misanthropic feelings are related to a basic distrust of other people and are linked to social capital. Social capital consists of a person's belief system and behaviours associated with social relationships, social connectedness and trust (TenHouten, 2007). Negative affect arises from the development of non-trustful and negative estimations of self-worth and of other people's intent, which impacts on an inclination to enter unfamiliar group situations (Bowlby, 1988). Trust is, therefore, crucial for a person to understand and recognise how emotions affect their own and other people's behaviour; trust portends social competency (Howe, 2005).

CFC inclusion worker, James, noted that when a new family came to a program, trust was very important and needed to be gained on the first meeting. James believed that trust was a major aspect of social inclusion:

*First time meeting, that's so important...you either gain their trust there and then or they'll never come back, so that's a huge aspect of inclusiveness and...you constantly have to be aware of as soon as someone walks in the door. (James, CFC worker)*

Practitioners were aware of the need to establish a trusting rapport with families but, as this was a two-way process, it could become difficult if a person would not allow the trust to flourish. Helen, a LiL teacher, observed that the gaining of trust allowed people to "open up" but that this was not an easy process and took time. Reiterating Bourdieu's (1990a) suggestion that it is naturally easier for practitioners to work with families who are socially engaged, Helen said:

*I find it really easy to work with people who open up but the ones who won't – it's, how to get them engaged and get them to start to trust and build that up and then open up with people so that they can be helped and get given the help that they need but that's a long, a long journey. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

Bridget observed that a lack of trust was exemplified in the way some people seemed unable to mix with others. She recalled how a lack of trust seemed to impact on a people's choice not to participate, because their focus seemed to be on avoiding potential unpleasant feelings:

*We have to use a range of different strategies to actually engage some families, because they choose not to or they don't feel comfortable in the Child and Family*

*Centre setting or they have their own social issues that impact upon them being able to be with other people. (Bridget, leader)*

This understanding, that a lack of social trust leads to anxious feelings and a desire to withdraw from social situations (Bowlby, 1988; Crittenden, 2005), is different from the psychological notion (Tiedens & Leach, 2004), that certain psychological disorders, within the individual, may be responsible for feelings of social withdrawal. CFC therapist, Claire, in adhering to the psychological tradition, did not perceive fear or withdrawal as emotionally-based social behaviours but suggested that conditions, such as post-natal depression (PND), preceded rather than derived from social withdrawal. Consequently, Claire argued that conditions, such as PND, precipitated social withdrawal:

*I don't know if that's possible to say that it's a social behaviour...I guess an observation like withdrawal could be from quite a lot of different needs and backgrounds and experiences, so I probably couldn't say that's because they're socially isolated...it's really hard to say that that's because they don't have the social skills – I think it comes to confidence. I mean post-natal depression is the cause of social anxiety. (Claire, therapist)*

Conversely, this thesis emphasises the social aspect of emotions, which revolves around a need to trust in the goodwill of other people (Ladd et al., 2006) and an ability to allay fears around expectations of feeling rejected and humiliated in social groups (Bowlby, 1988). Paradoxically, because of a lack of trust, the socially isolated are inclined to avoid threats of rejection (Bowlby, 1988) by withdrawing from the very services offering social inclusion.

The main way to encourage isolated families to attend programs was through outreach work, and education leader, Penny, talked about this service. She said that visits to some families could be difficult, and even dangerous, because of drug and mental health issues associated with volatile relationships. Bowlby's (1969/1982) explanation of fighting couples is that both parties have social difficulties and their hostilities towards each other stems from their loss of trust, which makes them constantly reactive to threats of abandonment and/or humiliation. The problem is that volatile couples can inadvertently instigate conflict in order to somehow test and/or sabotage their desire for enduring love/approval (Bowlby, 1979, 1988).



According to Bowlby (1988), this scenario emanates from emotionally-based attachment problems experienced in the pre-verbal stage of life. In adulthood, memories of highly stressful overwhelming feelings, felt in infancy, can be triggered with the slightest provocation (Bowlby, 1969/1982). These feelings erupt, in response to childhood-associated threats of abandonment and/or humiliation (Bowlby, 1969/1982) and can be heightened by the disinhibiting effects of alcohol and drugs, commonly used to self-medicate emotional stress. Instances of sudden violent outbursts in adulthood are characteristics of an insecure attachment experience in childhood (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment theory can explain the impact of early familial experiences on future social inclinations, because of the enduring emotional regulation difficulties. Consequently, emotional regulation difficulties severely impact on a person's ability to function socially (Howe, 2005).

Emotional damage was an issue for practitioners who have visited isolated families. They realised that, for some families, the presence of a social worker was merely another source of humiliation and was equally as unpleasant and confronting for practitioners. Those with highly chaotic lifestyles, overindulging in alcohol and drugs and experiencing volatile relationships seemed unlikely to be in a position to participate in ECEC programs, despite the support available:

*Some people...don't come along...for very complex reasons - sometimes there are alcohol or drug issues or domestic violence or lots of other reasons why some people don't come along and so you have to be very, very careful and, even with our own outreach, we have to make sure it's safe going into a flat or home. (Penny, leader)*

The emotional behaviours, most often observed by practitioners and parents, were an example of the uncomfortable feelings some people seem to experience, upon being in an unfamiliar social setting (Blakemore et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2005). Uncomfortable feelings are often related to anxiety states, driven by fears of unfamiliar situations (Nash, 1990; Bowlby, 1979, 1988; Cooley, 1902; TenHouten, 2007). In this research study, the fear of feeling socially rejected seemed high in those parents who worried about how they should behave or were easily embarrassed by their children's behaviours. Other emotional reactions were evident in the way people reacted to body language signals from others and the stress emanating from their mistrust of people. These emotional reactions all inhibit a desire to participate in unfamiliar social groups (TenHouten, 2007; Bourdieu, 1990b).

From a sociological perspective the need to belong is universal (Tiedens & Leach, 2004) but for the individual, a lack of self-esteem can lead to an avoidance of socially threatening situations (Bowlby, 1988). Although most people need to be socially included, fears can impede their inclination to engage in social groups, even those which may enhance their social networks and feelings of social inclusion (Bowlby, 1988).

This thinking differs from the psychological notion that emotions exist within the individual and relate to inherent personality traits, which decipher how an individual will react to events (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). In contrast, sociology acknowledges that emotions have a social life and cannot be described simply as a personality trait, because they require another person to be enacted (Tiedens & Leach, 2004).

To overcome the obstacles preventing some families from gaining social inclusion benefits, practitioners and parents were keen to offer recommendations, which they thought might resolve some of the participation issues. Their recommendations included (1) improving teacher/practitioner understandings, (2) less structured, more relaxed program approaches and (3) stronger incentives for families who were reticent in attending programs.

#### *6.1.2 Practitioner Recommendations*

- (a) Enhance teacher/practitioner understanding
- (b) More relaxed approach
- (c) More incentives to participate

##### **(a) Enhance teacher/practitioner understanding**

Two early learning leaders stressed that practitioners needed to be equipped with an understanding of the way cultural practices differ in some families. They suggested that practitioners require an ability to communicate in a way in which all families can relate, in order for them to better understand the way generational habits influence some behaviours:

*...need to try to get our teachers to understand why some of the families make the decisions they make...not to be judgmental but ...to understand why in generational poverty...but it's hard to reconcile even if you know the reasons - it's hard to reconcile why they still do it and not to judge...but we have to change our practices and communicate...get on Facebook...got to get their way, not our way. (Mary, leader)*

Bowlby (1988) explains the difficulties practitioners may encounter, especially those who have experienced a stable upbringing and, therefore, have no reference point with which to understand the behaviours in families who seem to lack social skills. Mary stated that teachers/practitioners now need personal skills in order to deal with social skill and engagement issues, in both adults and children:

*A lot of people don't have the skills...people who run these programs are teachers who haven't got training... and we're dealing with adults...we need two lots of training. One is experience with dealing with children – a lot more – and experience in dealing with adults... people who get these jobs have got experience in neither.*  
(Mary, leader)

Early learning leaders were aware that teachers are now required to be more involved in the community rather than just the school system. This extra work is time-consuming and practitioners sometimes felt separated from the mainstream, because of the varied nature and volume of work they needed to cover, often in a part-time capacity:

*You don't have any free time...to follow up an issue now when it needs following up...you feel quite isolated, because you're the only one in your school and often nobody else really understands exactly what is the pressure you're under....LiL people feel very isolated and often they're part time too so they come in, do their job and go again or they're multi but it's often that the LiL teachers...are really good sharing people.* (Mary, leader)

LiL teacher, Helen, suggested a need for teachers and practitioners to understand how reactions to body language and tone of voice impacted on the child's and parent's responses. Helen observed that practitioners need to be able to see how their behaviour and response affected children's and parents' self-esteem. She said that she would like to see more emphasis placed on the emotional side of learning:

*I think that if teachers, right from the time they come out of university, were used to being observed and being part of a really good model of feedback...I think we would develop a much better group of teachers building those really strong emotional capacity skills that enhance learning, you know, enhance children's confidence and belief in themselves...it's about that feedback and even watching yourself, being videoed...it is really challenging...however, you learn so much about what you do*

*that you don't think you do...some teachers get fear a lot quicker...children will behave, because they're really worried and I wonder if that is sometimes to do with the tone that some teachers have. (Helen, LiL teacher)*

Similarly, Julie stated that she would like all LiL and CFC practitioners to have the skills to be able to read people/children. The most important skill, according to Julie, is for practitioners to have the ability to be able to understand social behaviours rather than merely engage in instructive teaching:

*The key is (teachers) need the right personality – some teachers are not early childhood trained and have no empathy or understanding of people/children - run the program like a classroom – it's not so much about teaching; they've got to have that personality to start with. (Julie, LiL teacher)*

Bridget noted how practitioners are now required to work in the role of helping parents to become socially included. But for this purpose, specific skills and attributes are needed, particularly conversational skills and understanding about families with generational social barriers. Although acknowledging the success of ECEC approaches in improving children's cognitive learning, Bridget was aware of groups of families who still found it difficult to engage:

*Yes, highly skilled in conversation really, you know, around Family Partnerships type conversations to be able to get to where it is, why they are not engaging, so that would be the biggest barrier, I would say...actually understanding why it is that people are not engaging...generational, so whole families, you know, second and third generations still live here and they're still in very similar cycles of unemployment and disadvantage...Launching into Learning is making a difference in terms of cognitive outcomes...closing the gap between the disadvantaged and the not so disadvantaged, but there is a core of people that we struggle with. (Bridget, leader)*

LiL teacher, Julie, was highly focused on promoting the need for specialised practitioner skills in ECEC programs. She suggested that the most important skill was to be able to guide parents in teaching their children to adhere to boundaries and rules. Julie was not in favour of isolating children who behaved inappropriately, because she believed that young children

could easily learn how to behave socially. She has observed, however, that many parents need help in guiding their children's social behaviours:

*Children like rules/boundaries. Lots of parents, especially middle class, don't know how to train their children; too much information on the internet – sending children outside because of reactive behaviours is not helpful – parents need help in training children in appropriate social skills. (Julie, LiL teacher)*

Julie also recommended the more relaxed approach in ECEC programs, which she believed helped families to feel more comfortable and willing to participate.

### **(b) More relaxed approach**

According to Julie, the less structured, more relaxed approach was much more beneficial:

*...because parents need to feel okay and accepted initially...some programs are rigid and regimented...casual works best. (Julie, LiL teacher)*

Julie suggested that LiL programs were perhaps trying to cover too many activities. Based on her teaching experience, she found that teachers and practitioners need to be able to create impromptu activities and be more responsive to the families and situations of the day:

*...inviting dentist ladies to have a talk, whipping up scones on a rainy day, need to go with the flow. If something's not working, better to get rid of it (but) some teachers **have to** following the schedule. (Julie, LiL teacher)*

Based on her observations, Julie stated that there were many families who needed help with social skills and, for this reason, the most important issue was for them to actually **enjoy** coming to the programs. Julie noted that LiL was becoming a little too structured and outcome focussed. Even the facilitators were becoming structured in having to complete so much documentation:

*Have activities – parents don't want to know why, don't need all that guff – too much structure, too many people running LiL have no idea – worried - a lot of people out there are worried too. Need to come out to the coal face, (to see) why things are working (or not). (Julie, LiL teacher)*

In particular, Julie expressed serious concerns around parenting practices in Tasmania:

*The top paediatrician in Tasmania (is) worried about the lack of parenting skills.*  
(Julie, LiL teacher)

Other suggestions included a need to create incentives to encourage more participation.

### **(c) More incentives to participate**

One practitioner described her concerns for families who had been involved with Child Protection services. She was of the opinion that these families would have a chance to gain the benefits from LiL programs if they could be encouraged to attend:

*Wouldn't it be great if those mums, once a week, just had to come into the CFC and say "hello" to someone. You know, maybe over time you'd get somewhere with it.*  
(Helen, LiL teacher)

### *6.1.3 Parent Recommendations*

Parents also recommend that governments ensure reluctant families were motivated to participate. They suggested that incentives were a good way to encourage parents to attend programs which would assist them and their children. Parents, Miriam, Tess and Monika preferred a non-directive style of introducing new practices and the less structured, more relaxed approach in programs.

- (a) More encouragement to participate
- (b) More incentives to attend programs
- (c) Less directive practice
- (d) Less structured programs

### **(a) More encouragement to participate**

Three parents stated that families need more encouragement to attend programs but there seemed to be little acknowledgment of the many families who were not attending. To address this issue, they advocated for stronger incentives to ensure that families, who needed the most help, were utilising the supports available:

*Programs to help with parenting and child behaviours are not attended by parents who need it, just the ones who don't really need help.* (Miriam, Tess and Monika, LiL parents)

Some parents expressed an opinion that LiL and CFC participation should be compulsory and perhaps contingent on receiving some social welfare payments/benefits/bonuses:

*Should be compulsory...part of the Baby Bonus.* (Tess and Miriam, LiL parents)

The parents, who participated in this study, said they were initially encouraged to participate by the offer of free items. They believed that a continuance of these types of incentives might encourage more families to attend on a regular basis.

#### **(b) More incentives to attend programs**

Miriam noticed how government policies seemed to come and go. For instance:

*...earlier incentives, like free uniforms, were just stopped.* (Miriam, LiL parent)

In relation to the way new approaches and practices were being introduced, parents said they preferred that new ideas were not felt as being enforced.

#### **(c) Less directive practice**

One parent observed how other parents seemed to dislike being told how to behave and suggested that teachers need to:

*make sure that parents don't feel they're being lectured to.* (Miriam, LiL parent)

Although LiL parents, Nikki and Sarah, embraced the benefits of highly structured programs with many organised activities, others found that too many tasks were hectic and interfered with the flow and calming atmosphere.

#### **(d) Less structured programs**

Three parents said they felt more comfortable when the atmosphere was more casual:

*LiL can be too busy and structured - parents and children don't feel relaxed.* (Miriam, Monika and Tess, LiL parents)

For this reason, CFCs were highly focused on creating a more relaxed atmosphere in order that families would feel more comfortable and motivated to attend. Nevertheless, Sue (LiL teacher) was adamant that the more structured approach worked well and this view was supported by parents, Sarah and Nikki. Conversely, Julie's recommendation was for teachers

and practitioners to be more flexible in being able to gauge the situation;. She believed that, rather than follow a strict schedule, programs and activities should be implemented to suit the group needs on the day.

Overall, however, all participants agreed that both LiL and CFC programs were committed to supporting families and providing a welcoming venue so that all parents with young children could gain social inclusion benefits.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated, through the practitioner and parent accounts, how some people appear to lack social trust and are, therefore, missing out on much-needed social inclusion benefits. Emotional influences, in the form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990b) and territoriality (TenHouten, 2007), were noted by practitioners, June and Helen. They commented on the way some parents seemed to expect, as well as fear, being judged. Inclusion worker, James and teachers, Bridget and Helen, spoke about parents' reactions to the disdainful looks from established members of a social group; these looks signalled their rejection. Volunteer parent, Sonja, described the lack of autonomy in many parents, who sought her support to accompany them to programs and activities.

The notion of lost trust has been explained as being connected to emotional regulation difficulties, which impact on people's ability to function socially (Bowlby, 1988; Howe, 2005). Emotional affect was evident in some people's reactions to being in unfamiliar environments, which seemed to elicit fearful memories of past experiences, as inclusion worker, James and LiL teacher, Helen observed.

This chapter has examined how practitioner and parent perspectives can make sense of the theories which explain social behaviours, especially emotionally based actions. For instance, practitioners, Helen and June, observed how some parents chose childcare, which did not require their attendance. These parents' decision, to avoid participating in programs, was not met with approval by parents, Miriam and Tess. Practitioners, Bridget, Helen, June and James observed how emotional affect seemed to dissuade some parents from attending ECEC programs. Parents' emotional responses were expressed in their apprehension of being judged by other people and anxiety in not knowing how to behave. CFC practitioners, Vanessa, Julie, Raelene and Nellie observed some parents' lack of self-confidence when attending programs, and their difficulties in managing to bring children to the centres on a regular basis. Emotional reactions were observed by teachers, Helen, Bridget and Jane, who



saw signs of anxiety in some parents who appeared unable to mingle in unfamiliar group situations and often withdrew from attendance.

Conversely, the parents who decided to regularly participate in LiL and CFC programs seemed to be motivated by the expectation of long-term socio-educational rewards for themselves and their children. Participating parents seemed influenced by values, such as the importance of early learning and social inclusion principles. Jack expressed a willingness to attend CFCs, because it gave him an opportunity to socialise and allowed his grandson access to educational resources and social experiences. Imparting the values of social inclusion and early learning to reluctant families presented challenges for practitioners.

Another issue, frequently mentioned during the interviews, with practitioners and parents, was the need for many parents to learn more positive parenting practices. LiL and CFC practitioners, Julie and Tracy, noted that parenting assistance was a sensitive, albeit very important part of their work. Before families could be assisted, CFC worker, James, highlighted the need to gain their trust on the first visit. Both practitioners and parents remarked that participation in ECEC programs appeared as a matter of choice and that some families chose not to attend.

Bowlby's (1988) suggestion is that it is possible to see the impact of an earlier childhood insecure attachment experience by looking backwards; that is, adult social and emotional problems can be symptomatic of their early childhood issues. Practitioner and parents accounts have shown how emotional regulation difficulties seem to impact on people's ability to function socially (Howe, 2005).

The next chapter will examine the study findings in relation to the research question and theoretical framework. In doing so, the chapter will examine how historical practices, cultural mores and contemporary understandings of social inclusion impact on ECEC approaches. In answering the research question, the next chapter will examine how Bourdieu's (1984) *habitus* theory and Bowlby's (1973, 1988) ideas on attachment security can enhance understanding of social inclusion propensities. In the following chapter, practitioner and parent insights on social behaviours, within ECEC approaches, will be interwoven with the theories to assess contemporary understandings of social inclusion.

## **CHAPTER 7 - CONNECTING THEORIES WITH RESEARCH FINDINGS**

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Sociological theory (Weber, 1919/1956/1968) explains how social action can be driven by (1) instrumental cognitive choice, in the expectation of long-term rewards, (2) value-laden responses based on certain principles, (3) habits, relating to repetition of certain practices and/or (4) emotional urges, often influencing socially irrational un-chosen choices. For this doctoral project, the aim has been to gain more understanding of the underlying aspects of social behaviours and to dispel the misapprehension, in social study, that all people exercise rational choice (Bourdieu, 1990b). Drawing on Bowlby's (1973, 1969/1982, 1988) theory, this thesis proposes that the impact of early attachment experience, as an emotional experience, needs more attention because, although behaviour may be a cognitive choice, it can be socially irrational if based on memories associated with prior unpleasant experiences.

The thesis seeks to reveal social behavioural patterns by weaving relevant theories within the data drawn from a qualitative study of practitioners and parents involved in ECEC social inclusion programs. Furthermore, the differing conceptualisations of social inclusion and exclusion are noted. For example, Silver (2010) suggests that social inclusion is a process and refers to societal fairness and respect. In the contemporary ECEC context, the concept of social inclusion incorporates democratic principles of non-discrimination, an acceptance of diversity and inclusive practices. By providing easy access and opportunities for all families to participate in early childhood support programs, the ECEC goal is to reduce disadvantage, especially for those living in low SES areas (DEEWR, 2009). This may not be a simple solution, however, because it cannot be assumed that all people from certain locations experience social exclusion (Hattam & Smyth, 2014) and emotional problems (Eccelstone, 2007).

While not subscribing to social deficit (Hattam & Smyth, 2014) or rational choice assumptions (Bourdieu, 1990b), this doctoral research examines historical influences and the way differing cultural values impact on parenting practices which, in turn, may affect social inclinations. Theories encompassing historico-cultural aspects are examined in the context of the current ECEC focus on the early years where the emphasis is on inclusivity and diversity (Wong & Turner, 2014), parental involvement (Whalley, 2007) human rights, equality,

identity and self-regulation (Theobald et al., 2013). Regarding self-regulation, Bowlby (1979) suggests that emotional regulation capabilities are instigated by a secure attachment experience in infancy. Recently, emotional regulation issues have become a topic of concern, as noted in reports (Lawrence et al., 2015; AEDC, 2016) indicating heightened incidences of emotional problems, such as anxiety and depression, in Australian children.

Studying the emotional influences on social inclusion/exclusion is not a simple task, because of the difficulties in assessing non-tangible, situational-reactive behavioural patterns. For example, difficulties arise in attempting to quantitatively study pre-school children's attachment behaviours (Greenberg et al., 1990), because the variables are mostly reciprocal and reliant on interpersonal contingencies. Assessing concepts like cultural capital (Dumais, 2006) and emotional regulation (Stenseng et al., 2014) may be viewed as similarly elusive. Likewise, even though incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods, Reay (2010) resorts to anthropomorphising the concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984) to assess how the education culture impacts on parents' and children's choices. Tzanakis (2011) also finds challenges in quantitatively measuring Bourdieu's (1984) notion of the reproduction of inequality. Consequently, this research study follows Bourdieu's (1984) suggestion that the best way to gain information is to simply talk to the people involved in the study setting.

In deciphering the most helpful way to understand social behaviours, this thesis supports the notion that the mind and body, although interconnected, are not one and the same (Schuh & Barab, 2007). A concentration on the body supposes that the workings of the brain are a measurable entity (LeDoux, 1996) and tends to place the focus on cognitive learning. Conversely, an acceptance of the intangible nature of the mind can assist in understanding the influence of emotions on social behaviours. TenHouten (2007) suggests that the focus on cognitive rationality, as goal-seeking, thought-out behaviour, reflects modern Enlightenment Age-of-Reason thinking, which omits the influence of emotions. Analogous to the Apollonian<sup>7</sup> versus Dionysian<sup>8</sup> debate, on whether behaviour is perceived to be dominated by reasoned, enlightened cognitions or unbridled, dark emotions, this research thesis draws attention to the latter; the emotional aspects of social behaviours.

In exploring the emotional side of social behaviours, this chapter examines how social inclusion is understood by asking: What are contemporary understandings of social inclusion in ECEC approaches in Tasmania? This question contains three sub-questions, the first of

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<sup>7</sup> Apollonian – in Greek mythology, Apollo, son of Zeus, God of reason, logic and rationality

<sup>8</sup> Dionysian – in Greek mythology, Dionysus, son of Zeus, God of chaos, emotions and irrationality

which relates to understanding what precipitates social inclusion. By focussing on the emotional aspects of social behaviours, Bourdieuan and Bowlbian theories are used to provide both macro and micro explanations, which take into account the generational impacts of historical practices and influence of changing cultural ideas.

From a micro perspective, the significance of abstract thinking abilities is emphasised when discussing emotions and social behaviours. According to Bowlby (1951) abstract thinking ability needs to be recognised as the major aspect of a person's inclination to comply with social rules (Seifert, 2006). Emotional issues, therefore, need to be discussed in terms of survival needs (Allman, 2013), because social inclination is most likely related to one's early attachment experience.

Bowlby's (1973) theory proposes that it is during the pre-verbal stage of life that social cue interpretation and emotional regulation ability develop and predict peer relationship and overall social success (Schore, 2001; Tiedens & Leach, 2004; TenHouten, 2007). From a macro position, Bourdieu's (1984) theory describes how a person's early cultivated social dispositions can be a source of discrimination and social exclusion if they are not in tune with expected behaviours in the wider society.

The second sub-question examines how practitioner and parent insights, based on their observations and experience in LiL and CFC programs, can assist in understanding the cognitive and emotional aspects of social inclusion/exclusion. This question is pertinent, given that these programs are implemented as a preventative measure with the aim of reducing social disadvantage (DEEWR, 2009). The third sub-question asks whether better understandings, of the way social dispositions develop, are needed to ensure that ECEC approaches can realistically enhance social inclusion outcomes.

## 7.1 CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

To explore the contemporary understandings of social inclusion implicit in ECEC approaches, this thesis utilises theories which delve into the individual aspects of social behaviours, the societal issue of disadvantage and the sociology of emotions.

### **Sub-question 1**

How can Bourdieuan and Bowlbian theories assist in promoting more understanding of the reality of social inclusion/exclusion?

For this thesis, Bourdieuan and Bowlbian theories are used to provide a richer understanding of the concept of social inclusion, (1) to emphasise the importance of feeling socially included and (2) to show how social behaviour may often be motivated by emotions. To support these theories, Allman (2013) and TenHouten's (2007) ideas are sourced to add more in-depth explanations of the sociology of emotions. Their theories, explaining how social behaviour is linked to emotions, can assist in exploring how the concept of social inclusion is understood within ECEC approaches. For example, the Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania (Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009) alludes to external problems, such as high rates of Tasmanian families being dependent on government allowances, being unemployed and living below the poverty line. Indicators of social exclusion, cited in the strategy, are mental health, family violence and substance abuse problems, which elicit fears that the social fabric of society is unstable and less cohesive.

Currently, one of the major strategies to improve societal inclusion is through early childhood educational services, to encourage families with pre-school children to engage and link with community services (DEEWR, 2009). These strategies are based on evidence correlating reduced welfare dependency, school failure and delinquency outcomes, in those who have participated in ECEC programs (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000; Schwienhart et al., 2005; Gordon & Browne, 2011). Vinson (2009) argues that the correlation of higher literacy rates with improved future socio-economic success omits the major inhibitor of psychosocial wellbeing outcomes; that is emotional difficulties. Bourdieu's (1984, 1990a) theories provides some clarity to explain how a person's early childhood-acquired social dispositions can be activated in certain social settings and result in their discrimination and disadvantage.

### *7.1.1 Social Deficits*

What needs to be understood is that psychologically-based social success is not the same as economic success (Bourdieu, 1990a). An example was put forwards by LiL teacher, Helen, who, having taught in various school settings, observed that social deficits were not solely consigned to economically disadvantaged families. Based on her many years of teaching experience, Helen noticed that families from more affluent locations only differed in their ability to be more adept at concealing their behaviours. Conversely, emotional vulnerability may not be attributed to all families who may reside in low SES communities (Ecclestone, 2007). During the interviews for this study, education leader, John, and LiL teachers, Helen

and Sue, stressed that there were many families, in low SES areas, who valued education and exhibited high levels of self-sufficiency and social adeptness.

Notably, these characteristics were evident when talking to the eight parents, involved in this study, all of whom demonstrated a belief in education values and eagerness to regularly attend programs. These parents showed, in their conversations, that they were motivated to participate for their own social needs and for their children's socio-educational benefits. They articulated an understanding of the social inclusion message and an adherence to the idea that the early years are the most important time for their children to learn. Conversations with these parents, who all resided in low SES areas, highlighted the positive feelings they experienced when mingling with other parents. Miriam, Tess and Monika also observed many less-confident parents, and those with limited English language skills, who seemed motivated to attend LiL programs despite the obstacles. They perceived these parents as being prepared to overcome fears and inconvenience for the sake of their children's socio-educational needs. Conversely, there was no sympathy afforded the non-attending parents whom they viewed as being unwilling to make an effort to utilise supports and become socially included.

### *7.1.2 The Social Contract*

While many interpretations of social inclusion have existed throughout history, the assumption that a person's life-style choices determines whether they are deserving, or undeserving, of support and sympathy, appears constant. This perception arises from the notion of a social contract, which involves expectations of reciprocal social obligations (Allman, 2013). For this reason people may judge others as not meriting assistance if they appear to be choosing illicit pleasures and avoiding opportunities for social betterment.

An example of how judgements are made towards people, who seem to purposely shun societal norms, was evident in the comments of LiL parents, Miriam, Tess and Monika. Based on their own life experiences and values, they seemed to hold a dim view of parents who appeared not to be making an effort for their children's sake. This scenario reflects Bourdieu's (1999) suggestion that, to know the unwritten social rules requires having a sense of the social game; a skill which becomes a way of behaving, having been acquired in childhood. He suggests that these unwritten rules relate to an understanding of what is acceptable social behaviour. Furthermore, Allman (2013) argues that the societal need to maintain order requires that all citizens honour the social contract, and these presumptions are

implicit in the neo-liberal emphasis on reciprocity and responsibility, incorporated in the principles of mutual obligation and active participation. Hence, Silver's (2010) suggestion that everyone should have the capabilities, resources and responsibilities to participate in Australia's economic and community life.

Contrastingly, if the issue is mainly about an early-acquired knowledge of unwritten social rules (Bourdieu, 1999), it may not be a simple task to reduce discrimination, simply by offering equal opportunities and ensuring individual freedom is maintained, as Silver (2010) relates. Bourdieu (1990a) suggests that the idea of free will is often implicit in sociological research but does not acknowledge how some people may be impelled, or inclined, towards certain social behaviours. Consequently, the judgments of parents, who make an effort to fulfill their social obligations, are that non-compliant parents are choosing to be recalcitrant.

Rather than supposing people are always exercising a cognitive choice, Bowlby (1988) suggests an alternate explanation of people's seemingly feckless, irresponsible behaviours. He explains that these behaviours are more indicative of an inability to organise, plan and budget; that is, to be able to consider long term outcomes and modify behaviours. Bowlby (1988) helps to clarify that, rather than poverty *per se*, disorganised behaviours tend to feature in those who suffer from attachment problems. He emphasises the way people with social problems exhibit immature behaviour and extreme mistrust of others, causing them to become socially isolated. Furthermore, these patterns of behaviour usually persist throughout life, albeit in various degrees of severity.

Socially irrational behaviours can be seen as an indication of the difficulties some people have in coping with new situations or information (TenHouten, 2007). These difficulties impact on the formation of relationships and social integration. The desire for social relationships and connectedness relates to an instinctive need for bonding, which is characteristic in all people (Bowlby, 1988). The bonding need, however, must be instigated through the limbic system, but can be thwarted in those who have not experienced early attachment security (TenHouten, 2007). Consequently, although bonding inclinations are a basic need, these ties can be interrupted if stress hormones, such as cortisol, become elevated, creating increased arousal and vigilance around social relationships. Fear of inadequacy in social situations can, therefore, become pathological and include an inability to make decisions and problem solve; these social difficulties can render long-term goal-seeking behaviours almost impossible. Understanding this aspect of social inclusion difficulties may be helpful when implementing ECEC approaches which currently focus on fairness, equality

and individual freedom. More in-depth understanding of social inclusion may assist ECEC programs in implementing more targeted approaches to reduce obstacles to social inclusion. For example, a major obstacle, and characteristic of an insecure attachment experience, is an inability to adopt abstract attitudes (Bowlby, 1951). This inability manifests in lacks of imagination and capacity to engage in pretend play in early childhood (Seifert, 2006). What may frequently be misunderstood is that these childhood characteristics align with future incapacities to adhere to rules and orderliness; this overall lack of organisation leads to adult neglect of household duties, irresponsibility and undisciplined behaviours (Bowlby, 1951).

Education leader, June, and inclusion worker, James, stated they were particularly careful not to appear directive towards families who seemed unaware of the “unwritten rules” in certain social situations. Without a deep awareness of these complex issues, people can be inclined to may make instant judgements towards those who seem to be shunning societal norms and failing to honour the social contract of reciprocity (Allman, 2013). Teachers and practitioners are, therefore, expected to model behaviours of acceptance and understanding (Allman, 2007).

Education leader, Penny, for example, said she focused on a culture of inclusion and acceptance to ensure judgements were not made towards families, who outwardly displayed inappropriate behaviours. An example was noted by James, a CFC inclusion worker, who noticed how some parents were in the habit of continuously checking social media sites on their mobile phones. These behaviours were not conducive to the purpose of the program, which was for parents to interact with their children. Nevertheless, to help parents learn more appropriate social behaviours, practitioners often talked about the expected guidelines within contemporary ECEC programs. To enlighten parents as to appropriate behaviours, LiL teacher, Sue, said she was constantly reminding parents of the rules. Knowing how to behave socially was an important skill for children to acquire, according to CFC practitioner, Julie. She spoke passionately about her desire to help parents instil an understanding of rules and boundaries in their children. Julie was adamant that the most important skill, for children to grasp, was to realise the need to comply with social norms.

### *7.1.3 New Ideas*

Contemporary societal norms align with ECEC principles which place emphases on gender equality, fairness and autonomy (Wong & Turner, 2014; Theobald et al., 2013). To ensure societal cohesion, however, this thesis strives for more acknowledgment of the emotional



basis of social inclusion as related to the individual's infantile maternal proximity experience, being essential for their future psychosocial health (Bowlby, 1951, 1973). As people are generally unaware of the pressures to adhere to dominant cultural expectations, it is beholden on societies' leaders to be cautionary in adopting certain new ideas (Bowlby, 1988).

New ideas, which are not conducive to children being exposed to an optimum foundation, with which to flourish in adulthood, may need to be reassessed to avoid increases in societal emotional dysfunction (Bowlby, 1988). Green and Scholes (2004) note how new ideas, emerging in the 1960s and 70s, appear in opposition with the emotional needs of very young children. They suggest that these new ideas do not often support the child's need to feel a sense of availability, proximity and responsiveness of their primary caregiver. Dominant ideas are, instead, popularising gender and economic equality as paramount to any conflicting considerations (Green & Scholes, 2004).

The downplaying of the importance of attachment security to focus on gender discrimination, is evident in Cleary's (1999) critique of Bowlby's (1973, 1988) explanation of the way early emotional feelings of abandonment and loss are acquired. Ainsworth (1962) considers that Bowlby's theory is merely misunderstood and misinterpreted. Whether these misunderstandings are purposeful or inadvertent, policy makers may need to consider the long term effects of dominant cultural ideas (Green & Scholes, 2004). This thesis has highlighted a need to encourage values which shape parenting practices and reward and support improved social behaviours, especially for the most disadvantaged. Conversely, the implementing of culturally-influenced policies, especially around equality of workforce participation, may risk creating the very problems being addressed by services (Green & Scholes, 2004). Contemporary understandings of social inclusion within ECEC services, however, align with dominant cultural ideas promoting gender equality, fairness and autonomy (Wong & Turner, 2014; Theobald et al., 2013).

Contemporary cultural norms of the 2000s are included in the social inclusion agenda of the welfare and educational sector, which relies heavily on ECEC services to deliver equitable opportunities for all families (DEEWR, 2009). In pursuing a social inclusion agenda, practitioners, June, Mary, Sue, Penny and James expressed their desire to encourage all families in their area to take advantage of the opportunities to engage in their support programs. Nevertheless, as James noted, there were some families who lived close by, but were still not interested in attending.

Bourdieu (1990a) suggests a need to establish what motivates people and, in doing so remain mindful that psychological and economic influences are not the same. This thesis highlights how misunderstanding of the motivations behind certain social behaviours may be contributing to criticisms of Bourdieu's writings, especially *habitus* theory. Nash (1990), Reay (2010), Sullivan (2002) and Hattam and Smyth (2012), for example, suggest that the concept of *habitus* hints of determinism, because it promotes a deficit theory. Rather than being deterministic, Bourdieu's (1984) theory merely shows that a person's social dispositions are formed from varying early learned experiences and situations, all of which impact differently on their responses in varying circumstances.

#### *7.1.4 Understanding social inclusion*

The issue appears to be in the perception of social inclusion, how it comes about and how it relates to, and is affected by, social relationship abilities. The contemporary understanding is that to be socially included involves the human right of equality and an acceptance of diversity (Wong & Turner, 2014; Theobald et al., 2013). Bourdieuan and Bowlbian theories, however, demonstrate that for early childhood social inclusion programs to address social exclusion and disadvantage, requires that all families be motivated to attend ECEC support programs. Similarly, to realistically promote equality and reduce the social isolation implicit in people's inability to interact socially may require approaches to ensure all children experience a secure attachment experience in infancy. Bowlby (1988) provides great clarity in explaining how a secure attachment experience is needed for a person to acquire feelings of protection and develop appropriate proximity strategies, to ensure psychosocial success.

The research thesis highlights the complexity of examining and understanding how social inclusion is acquired, because it seems to involve body language responses to other people (Bowlby, 1988) and not merely a cognitive choice to behave socially. Contemporary social inclusion ideas of fairness, autonomy (Wong & Turner, 2014), non-discrimination, and acceptance of diversity and equality (Wong et al., 2012; Theobald et al., 2013), seem to omit the emotional aspects of feeling socially included. Ultimately, to fully comprehend the concept of social inclusion requires an ability to grasp the difference between the concepts of socialisation and acculturation (Gaskins, 2013). The difference is that socialisation relates to an attachment-related ability to interpret social cues and regulate emotions, to enable adherence to social rules and social inclusion (Bowlby, 1988). Conversely, acculturation

refers to diversities, such as ethnicity, gender, economic status and class, and includes early childhood cultivated dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984).

The next sub-question involves practitioner and parent accounts of social behaviour in determining perceptions of social inclusion as a cognitive and/or emotional issue.

## 7.2 PRACTITIONER AND PARENT INSIGHTS

### **Sub-Question 2**

What insights can be gained from practitioners and parents concerning whether, and when, social behaviour is a cognitive choice or predominantly an emotional inclination?

The ultimate mission for contemporary ECEC support services is to help families and, in particular, to ensure that young children thrive (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). For these services to attain social inclusion goals, however, requires a combination of scholarly knowledge and practitioner insights concerning early childhood strategies and practices (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). It is important, therefore, to include theory and practitioner input, so as to ensure the implementation of appropriate social policy initiatives/strategies that can enhance individual and societal wellbeing without perpetrating unintended consequences.

Insights from practitioners, involved in this research, included them noticing how some parents seem highly sensitive to perceived slights directed towards their parenting behaviours. For this reason, CFC worker, Tracey, was eager to avoid the potential unintended consequence of parents withdrawing to avoid scrutiny. Another unintended outcome, outlined by education leader, Bridget, was that, although the stylish CFCs were meant to entice socially isolated families, the ultra-modern environment initially had the reverse effect of deterring some from entering. By far, the major unintended consequence, noted by all practitioners and parents, was that the families for whom the ECEC services were implemented were not those who were keen to attend. The insights of practitioners and parents matched Allman's (2013) assertion, that the families who are already social included will be the ones who will mostly gain benefit from social inclusion policies and services.

The interviews and discussions with practitioners, Sue and Helen, and parents, Miriam, Tess and Monika, revealed that families were gaining huge benefits from LiL and CFC programs. They were aware, however, that families who regularly attended, were usually not the ones for whom the programs were originally initiated. All the practitioners

and parents, involved in this study, commented that the families who were most in need of social, community and education support did not seem inclined to participate. Consequently, because social policy has moved away from a focus on alleviating economic poverty towards enhancing social inclusion, the main challenge is now to address issues of redistribution, access and participation (Allman, 2013).

### *7.2.1 Participation*

Family participation is encouraged and advocated and, as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) guidelines state, the major theme of educational reform is to ensure access to nationally consistent quality early childhood education for pre-school children. A focus on participation is the key to ensuring parents' social wellbeing, but particularly to enhance their children's transition to school and future socio-economic success (DEEWR, 2009). Practitioner insights showed that easy access to programs, alone, could not always guarantee participation, especially for people who felt uncomfortable in unfamiliar territory. CFC worker, James, for example, said he was aware of many families in his area, who would not move far away from their own familial groups and, mostly, not even venture into another town. He observed that, although programs were overwhelmingly inclusive and welcoming and within walking distance, this did not seem sufficient to entice some families to attend.

Another insight, provided by education leader, John, offered a realistic explanation as to why some families were deterred from attending programs. He said he understood that some families were fully aware of their inability to budget and tendency to spend money on alcohol and drugs. Having grown up in the local area, John had a personal knowledge of many families and knew they would be averse to putting themselves in the presence of other seemingly "sensible and organised" families.

A further insight, provided by sixteen practitioners and four of the parents, was that external barriers, such as disability or language, were not the main consideration in being socially included or excluded. They observed that the major issue seemed to be parents' personal autonomy and social confidence. Self-confidence, according to Bowlby (1979) aligns with self-esteem, being the ability to look after one's self and feel worthy of being helped. This is an interesting insight and reflects Cooley's (1902) suggestion that a person's sense of personal power is exemplified in their ability to exert some control over life and people in general. These explanations help in understanding how it is mainly a lack of self-confidence that seems to leave some people feeling socially isolated (Kennedy & Kennedy,

2004). This thesis has shown how the concept of social inclusion can be understood more clearly as being linked to the early development of feelings of disempowerment and disconnectedness; these emotional feelings relate directly to patterns of attachment in infancy (Crittenden, 2005).

Practitioners' insights were informative in recounting instances of parents they observed who seem severely socially impaired, because of an apparent lack of personal power. In these circumstances, parent-volunteer Sonja, proudly related how she was often called upon to accompany parents who were fearful of attending activities alone. Similarly, practitioners, Raelene and Helen, observed how parents' lack of self-confidence seemed to impact on their inclination to participate. They had seen many parents who appeared quite apprehensive and in need of another person, such as a mother or friend, to accompany them to the programs.

Education leader, June's descriptions created a poignant image of the behaviour of some parents on their first visit to the ECEC program. June noticed certain parents who, although seemingly aware of their need to participate, would come in, sit quietly for a while and then retreat without being noticed. Similarly, CFC worker, James, said he was often surprised at the way parents seemed to enjoy their first visit to the centre, but did not return.

The situation is vastly different for those parents who were enthusiastic and eager to gain the social benefits for themselves and their children. LiL parent, Nikki, for example, exhibited a high degree of self-confidence and determination to be involved. Nikki described her satisfaction with her local LiL service after she had tried a previous, less suitable venue. This research thesis finds that the motivation to regularly attend early childhood and family support services seems to coincide with parents' self-confidence, in knowing the benefits of socialising and in their determination to find a suitable pre-school setting for themselves and their children. Miriam, Tess, Monika, Sarah, Lana and Nikki presented as enthusiastically motivated to meet other parents and eager to provide a good pre-school social foundation for their children. Grandfather, Jack, said that he attended the CFC mainly for the company of other adults and for his grandson's benefit.

### *7.2.2 Emotions, Cognitions and Social Behaviour*

In response to the second sub-question, this thesis highlights how differences in perceptions, of the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion, determine whether social learning is viewed primarily as a cognitive or an emotional issue. It would seem that emotional influences are

significant, because they result from a person's social experiences and provide meaning to their world (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Emotional responses occur in the presence of other people who generate repelling or inclusive feedback and this idea differs from the psychology tradition. Tiedens and Leach (2004) suggest that the perception, within the discipline of psychology, is that emotions are private states within the individual, from where responses to events are regulated by norms and moral values. A more sociological understanding of the nature of emotions is that they are reciprocal in terms of social experience and behaviour. The psychological view, that emotions exist solely within the individual, does not explain how emotions require a social relationship to trigger certain responses/reactions (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). ECEC approaches, in following contemporary understandings of social inclusion, may not account for the influence of emotions on social behaviours.

While emotions may be felt within the body, their purpose is to provide a link to the outside world through other people, who elicit feelings of belonging or rejection (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). The impact of emotions on people's behaviours was evident in this research, particularly in the comments from practitioners. While practitioners tried to instil non-judgmental attitudes, they were aware that parents could not avoid absorbing body language signals. Insights gained from LiL teachers, Bridget and Helen were based on their observations of some groups, or individuals, who inadvertently behaved in a rejecting or withdrawing way. LiL teacher, Helen, for instance, described a parent who turned her back upon being introduced to another parent. Helen noted how this behaviour conveyed a message of rejection and appeared to sabotage any chance of social inclusion for this parent. Vanessa, a CFC inclusion worker, remarked on the way some parents displayed self-excluding behaviours and seemed incapable of knowing how to join in.

Attachment theory, based on the ethological notion of sign-stimulus, shows how a person can come to develop expectations of rejection, causing them to actually elicit negative social responses from others (Bowlby, 1982). In answering sub-question 2, this research highlights how emotional responses, although linked to cognition, are more about classical, rather than operant, conditioning in terms of the emotionally-based triggers which influence social behaviours. For the purpose of understanding human behaviour, sociological study appears more beneficial as it not only assesses cognitive aspects but is also concerned with the emotional components of social behaviour (TenHouten, 2007). Sociological study can examine the complexity of emotions; that is, emotions are reactions relating to adaptation to certain environments. The thesis, therefore, supports the idea that an understanding of

emotions requires consideration of varying epistemological and philosophical theories to include biological/evolutionary, psychological, social and cultural ideas of the body, mind and society (TenHouten, 2007). The multi-disciplinary perspectives, shown in chapter 2 of this thesis, can, therefore, assist in providing a more broad understanding of social inclusion with which to enhance contemporary ECEC approaches.

In view of the varying ways of understanding and addressing emotionally-based behaviour, the philosophical underpinnings of this research thesis adheres to the idea that the mind and body, although collaborative, are separate entities. That is, that the mind is concerned with emotions as the primary driver of social behaviour, while the body (including the brain) responds cognitively and physically to the emotionally-driven perception of the self and others (Schuh & Barab, 2007). This thinking is similar to that of neuroscience as it outlines the two major aspects of rationality in the mental life of humans; that is, cognitions and emotions which are distinct but also interacting (TenHouten, 2007). Again, an understanding of the distinction between cognitions and emotions may need to be incorporated into contemporary ECEC approaches which aim to facilitate social inclusion.

Bowlby (1979) suggests that learning theorists, by concentrating on cognitions, do not acknowledge the part played by human feelings. Human feelings are stronger, but being below the level of consciousness, sometimes motivate seemingly irrational social behaviour. Although the contemporary trend is to examine how people make sense of their environment through cognitions, this doctoral thesis highlights the foundational impact of emotional reactions to social encounters. It is, therefore, imperative to understand that emotions cannot exist solely in the individual, because they cannot be separate from the social world (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). For this reason, emotional problems, rather than being viewed as an individual disorder to be diagnosed, categorised and medicalised, need to be understood as a reflection of the ability, or not, to connect socially. This skill is described by Schore (2001) as an ability to affectively synchronise with other people. Other people generate emotional responses through expressions of certain “display rules”, which are interpreted and felt as repelling or bonding (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). The description, by education leader, June, of the way the “Queen Bee” deters some parents from attending a program, is an example of this phenomenon.

In this thesis, the theoretical framework and practitioner insights challenge the idea that humans behave in a socially rationally way by acting intentionally towards long term goals. Rationality denotes an ability to exercise reason and be organised and systematic in

decision-making and, thus able to control emotions (TenHouten, 2007). This assumption omits the fact that some people, in certain social situations, may be overwhelmed by emotional triggers.

Bourdieu (1990a) suggests that the problem for rational actor theorists is their inability to explain irrational behaviour, which forces them to resort to providing ideal examples of how a reasonable person should be expected to act. In other words, in the pursuit of rationality and free choice, cognitivists seek an ideal example of a social person to demonstrate how everyone should be able to act (Bourdieu, 1990a). Elements of solipsism<sup>9</sup> may possibly be hindering understanding of the emotional impacts on social inclusion by serving to disguise the way disadvantage can be exacerbated by policies and dominant cultural ideas, historically and contemporarily (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990a; Bowlby, 1988; Green & Scholes, 2004).

### *7.2.3 Cognition and Choice*

Within the Social Inclusion guidelines (Australian Government, 2010) there is an expectation that choice is implicit in decisions to participate in the self-improvement opportunities afforded by ECEC support programs. The idea of cognitive choice appears to have been absorbed by both practitioners and parents and was prominent in the answers they gave. For example, it was assumed that parents exercised a choice to access childcare in preference to engaging in the parent-child interactive programs. As, LiL teachers, Helen and Jane, stated, “It’s all about choice” and whether the parent wants to be involved. The perception was that it was usually the families, who most needed assistance, who were choosing not to attend LiL and CFC programs. All sixteen practitioners and eight parents expressed a belief that choice was implicit in people’s social behaviours.

It seems that a focus on choice, being a response to cognitive awareness, may not take into account the stronger influence of emotional triggers as determining social behaviours. As Bowlby (1999) suggests, there is a direct link between emotions and action, to which cognitivists rarely refer. It was during the 1950s and 60s that this “cognitive revolution” emerged and followed the behaviourist emphasis on operant conditioning. This perspective seems to disregard classical conditioned responses or, as Bowlby (1988) prefers, the possibility that instincts could motivate social behaviour. Nevertheless, a recent shift from

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<sup>9</sup> Solipsism – the view that nothing exists or is known, beyond one’s own experience



the learning (cognitive) model has occurred, because it can no longer be assumed that behaviours are simply learned and, thus, can easily be unlearned (Scott, 2012). This shift has taken place, because biological evidence now shows the significant effects of parenting practices on children's physical, psychological and social behavioural outcomes.

This is an important breakthrough, as it validates Bowlby's (1988) suggestion that the ability to appropriately reciprocate and interpret social cues is acquired upon experiencing a secure attachment in infancy. The key, therefore, in predicting whether ECEC services will be able to successfully reverse social problems, is in the young child's ability to understand and interpret social cues (Scott, 2012).

Consequently, if the educational approach relies too much on the cognitive tradition (Johansson, 2006) it may overlook acknowledgment of the influence of unseen others (Spodek & Saracho, 2006). The major issue is that concentration needs to be placed on the meaning of behaviour rather than the behaviour itself (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Although, attachment ramifications are acknowledged and parental involvement encouraged in contemporary ECEC approaches (Whalley, 2008), this thesis seeks the meaning of social behaviours in terms of the emotional component of that meaning.

By ignoring emotions, a focus on cognitions may actually exacerbate the reproduction of disadvantage by assuming that economic explanations of exclusion are the same as structural inabilities to participate (Allman, 2013). Integration is more about power, because power enables or prevents inclusion by penalising the propensities of the excluded and normalising the shortcomings of the included groups (Allman, 2013). In Bourdieuan terms, it is more about knowing the rules of the game. Knowing how to play the game is, however, an ability which needs to be cultivated from one's earliest social experiences (Bowlby, 1988; TenHouten, 2007; Bourdieu, 1984). Contemporary ECEC approaches, designed to address social inclusion, may be overlooking the discrimination which arises from social skill disadvantage; that is, some people's lack of awareness of the unwritten social rules.

Additionally, another misapprehensions in attempting to understand social behaviour, may reside in the idea that economic success is the same as psychological success and that people always exercise free rational choice (Bourdieu, 1990a). This thesis notes the complexity of understanding the real nature of social inclusion. That is, being socially included appears more of a feeling involving responses and reactions from other people in combination with one's own feelings of self-worth, and which depends on the degree of emotional affect elicited in certain social situations (TenHouten, 2007; Bourdieu, 1990a;

Bowlby, 1988). Bourdieu's (1984) insights further explain how the reproduction of disadvantage occurs when a person's behaviours appear alien to the cultural values imposed by structural forces, such as those associated with educational services. This macro perspective suggests that social dispositions, acquired in early childhood, can affect the way a person is received and treated in certain social situations and within certain social structures (Bourdieu, 1984). From the micro perspective, Bowlby's attachment theory (1973, 1988), refines this knowledge by explaining the way individual social skills develop in response to experiences of parental bonding in infancy.

#### *7.2.4 Emotions and Trust*

It is, therefore, important to understand how emotions are acute and episodic with the purpose of adapting to changes in the environment (TenHouten, 2007). Although emotions are necessary for rational thought, difficulties can arise when they become fixed belief systems. These fixed beliefs may effect a person's emotional reactions, especially if they have experienced unpleasant feelings in previous, similar situations (TenHouten, 2007). The insights gained from the theories and qualitative data, disseminated in this research, are that irrational social behaviours may be a result of people's fixed beliefs, based on memories of feelings felt in previous circumstances. These fixed feeling associations can be projected onto other settings, even those which are much less threatening or even highly inclusive.

An example of this phenomenon was evident from the insights of CFC worker, James, whose reflections were based on his observations of certain people who attended CFCs. James observed how some people seemed to be fearful even in a relaxing, welcoming and inclusive setting with helpful, caring practitioners. He was aware of the crucial need to establish trust with new families, immediately on the first meeting. Educators, June, Helen and Jane spoke of the way some parents, especially those with Child Protection involvement, were averse to any institutions; this aversion was based on their prior unpleasant experiences. Another insight, from LiL teacher, Sue, and CFC worker, Vanessa, was that parents not only felt anxious about their own behaviour but became distressed over their children's actions. Practitioners reported how some parents appeared unable to cope with the anxiety which arose when their children seemed to be misbehaving.

LiL teachers, Julie and Sally, and education leader, Bridget, discussed another unexpected emotional reaction they had observed. They described the fearful demeanour exhibited by some parents upon entering a very new and unfamiliar environment. These

practitioners all stated that they noticed how some parents became uncomfortable and stressed on their first visit to the centres, especially around simple matters, such as not knowing where to put their cup or park their pram. The insights gained by education leader, Bridget, and CFC worker, Raelene, showed how simple things were often a source of worry to people who seemed unsure of how they should act; the unspoken rules appeared unknown.

Considerations on this type of behaviour are made by TenHouten (2007) who explains how a lack of confidence, in not knowing the rules, can manifest in shame which is more about one's self-esteem. He provides understanding of the difference between embarrassment and shame; that is, the lesser emotion of embarrassment can be rectified, whereas shame is felt when a person has doubts about their own self-worth and blames themselves for their mistakes. Overwhelming feelings of shame usually lead to the afflicted person removing themselves from the stressful situation. Fortunately, not all people experience such strong emotions, because those who have acquired a sense of being socially supported find it easier to overcome their initial embarrassments (TenHouten, 2007). It is usually people with higher needs for social approval who may experience more intense feelings of anxiety in social situations (MacDonald & Leary, 2005).

ECEC practitioners are generally skilled in inclusive and non-judgmental modes of dealing with families and their insights, along with parents' comments, are important in providing understandings of social behaviours. These insights, together with sociological theories on emotions, are sought to encourage a more nuanced understanding of the more complex aspects of social inclusion.

### 7.3 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INCLUSION

#### **Sub-Question 3**

How can better understandings of socially-acquired dispositions, in the context of historical and cultural factors, assist ECEC approaches in facilitating enhanced social inclusion outcomes for families?

#### *7.3.1 Social Inclusion Ideas*

Contemporary notions have moved from the original idea of social inclusion being a survival need to be part of a group. This survival notion seems to have subsided with emerging importance being placed on autonomy, individual liberty and solidarity of marginalised groups. Although necessitating welfarism, more emphasis is now being placed on minority

groups in keeping with democratic principles which denounce discrimination (Allman, 2013). Social inclusion is now on the social policy agenda in which reliance is placed on early childhood and family support programs as a way to assist groups of people, who may be marginalised and at risk of discrimination and exclusion (DEEWR, 2009).

In seeking to gain a deeper understanding of social inclusion, this thesis draws on sociology and ethology to explain the emotional basis of social dispositions and the development of feelings of social inclusion. As Allman (2013) suggests, social inclusion/exclusion issues have existed throughout history and across cultures, and usually signify feelings of being welcomed in, or ignored by, the social group. To be able to fully understand the implications of social exclusion, however, requires knowing how ostracism creates various forms and degrees of psychosocial distress, all of which emanate from social disconnectedness (Bowlby, 1969/1982). It seems that there is an evolutionary function implicit in the need to feel included in the social group (Allman, 2013). What is sometimes misunderstood is that being (and feeling) socially included remains a survival mechanism with the purpose of avoiding the pain of separation and exclusion.

The contemporary view, however, is that social inclusion is a concept relating to the elimination of the domination processes, perceived to be impinging on marginalised groups' capacity to participate in economic life (Allman, 2007). In keeping with this description of what constitutes societal wellbeing, Australia's Social Inclusion Principles (Australian Government, 2010) advocate reducing discrimination and providing access to education and support services to ensure everyone is afforded equal socio-economic opportunities. Historico-cultural factors also need to be taken into account when understanding fluctuating levels of social connectedness (Bourdieu, 1984; Bowlby, 1998; Crittenden, 2005). An examination of historical cultural practices can, therefore, assist in understanding present-day social inclusion issues.

### *7.3.2 Historical and Generational Implications*

A major present-day strategy aimed at increasing levels of social inclusion, in Australia, is ECEC participation, and this differs from previous maternal child health services where the aim was to help families with physical health outcomes (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). Many early childhood services throughout history have served to address various situational and cultural needs of the time. In recent history, however, although child health was being addressed, the implications of child separation were not prioritised.

The outcomes of severing early childhood attachments are significant in the context of social policies in recent history. These policies encouraged widespread removal of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children; a practice known to cause dire psychosocial consequences for subsequent generations (NSDC, 2015). The notion that early childhood separation affects mental health and psychosocial wellbeing is strongly felt in terms of the ramifications for Indigenous children, as described in the Stolen Generation Report (2015). This report cites historical practices, especially the removal of children, which caused generational stress for Indigenous people. At the same time, many non-Indigenous children also suffered early parental separation, because of widespread adoption practices in Australia (Higgins, 2010).

It is important, therefore, to understand how historical practices, of child separation, can result in adverse consequences, because of the way social behavioural patterns continue through generations (Bourdieu, 1990b). Bourdieu (1990b) provides some understanding of the way schemes of perception, taste and social action become entrenched in a person's overall social dispositions, and that these social orientations are handed down, generationally.

Over the last five to six decades, cultural practices have changed along with policy incentives, previously promoting committed relationships by offering cheap home purchase for couples and now supporting sole parent families (Lewis, 2000). These changes reformed previous undesirable practices of removing children from single parents for adoption; that is, single parents are now provided with welfare support and accommodation (Lewis, 2000).

Bowlby's (1988) timely message continues to remind western societies that parenting is a constant occupation, both physically and emotionally draining, and particularly challenging for a single person without strong support networks. In Tasmania there are high numbers of single parents, many of whom are struggling and disadvantaged (Commissioner for Children, Tasmania Report, 2013). While the prevailing culture embraces diversity and free choice, there remains, in most people, a strong need to form meaningful relationships and lasting connectedness. Bowlby's (1988) theory recognises that, although people desire this connectedness, some are unable to form secure relationships in adulthood. The main understanding, to be gained from Bowlby's (1988) theory, is that those who have experienced separation and a lack of bonding in infancy may find difficulties in forming relationships and in being able to affectively parent their own children.

Bowlby's, (1988) position is similar to Bourdieu's (1990b), who states that the cycle of family dysfunction continues, because of the patterns of social behaviours acquired in

early childhood. While no causal link between historical practices, family behaviours and people's attachment experiences has been sought for this research study, family mental health issues were mentioned by practitioners as a matter of concern. Education leaders, Penny and June spoke about their awareness of family violence and substance abuse in some households and that these environments presented risks, not only for family members but also for practitioners conducting outreach visits. Bowlby (1988) suggests that it is possible to view the impact of insecure attachments backwards; that is, relationship difficulties, mental health and substance abuse problems, in adulthood, most likely stem from foundations of insecure early childhood experiences.

Historical practices, which are not conducive to childhood wellbeing may, therefore, contribute to generational psychosocial malaise (Bowlby, 1988). In Australia, for instance, standards of social welfare have vastly improved, but generational psychosocial difficulties are rising; the prevailing culture seems to be exacerbating social exclusion (Moore, 2007; Green & Scholes, 2004). Bourdieu provides explanation for this situation when he suggests that there is a "sociogenesis of psychosis and neurosis" (1990a, p. 116). That is, most psychological distress is socially derived. This statement does not, however, signify determinism, because a person's social dispositions evolve in accordance with specific historically cultivated/learned practices and changes, and in response to specific social settings. While psychological problems may relate to one's social experiences, it is not possible to definitively determine how a person's learned responses may develop, Bourdieu (1990a) explains. Each person experiences different social situations, and, for this reason, everyone is affected in various degrees, commensurate with their early experiences and depending on historical factors and cultural changes.

For this reason, Bourdieu's (1984) *habitus* theory, in the sociology of education, can be helpful in explaining how social dispositions develop from childhood experiences and are built up through years of repetition. *Habitus* is a term used to describe a person's *modus operandi* in negotiating social situations. From an ethological, individual perspective, Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory also assists in understanding how these early-learned social dispositions (sign stimuli) can trigger emotional reactions in future social encounters, especially if they elicit early socially-stressful memories.

In the contemporary setting, it seems to be the responsibility of educational services to action a therapeutic role by striving to improve children's/parents' social behaviours (Watson et al., 2012). Bourdieu (1977) suggests that it may be difficult for educational programs to

reduce disadvantage and discrimination simply by facilitating social inclusion, because this process involves trying to impose new values on some families. This research has found that the parents in the study, who regularly attended LiL and CFC, had an understanding of the educational values and purpose of ECEC programs. Although some parents expressed concerns about the changes in program focus, they all seemed committed to the overall purpose of LiL and CFCs. Families who are reluctant to attend did not seem to adhere to the same values, as education leader, John, noted.

Watson and Tully (2008) suggest that the way to encourage disinclined families to actively engage with programs may be to use a more flexible approach. LiL teacher, Julie, reiterated this idea and advocated a need for more flexible strategies, which she believed would definitely encourage more families to attend programs. Another challenge, mentioned by practitioners, was that they often had difficulties in being able to contact some parents. To address this issue, Watson and Tully (2008) suggest a universal monitoring system, but one which will not stigmatise the targeted groups.

LiL and CFC practitioners advised that they have gained more access to information, but that parents still need to agree to be contacted by providing their details upon their first ante-natal visit to the child health clinic. This means that families, who actively choose not to be contacted and have no intention of participating in programs, still need to be identified and visited by practitioners in an outreach capacity. When interviewing the sixteen practitioners for this research, they all commented that outreach was time-consuming and difficult and required high levels of interpersonal skills, resources and creativity. Practitioners described the many ideas which have been implemented to encourage more families to participate. One idea was to leave boxes of books and games to allow an opportunity to engage with families upon returning to collect and exchange these items. Currently, the only way to meet families, who are not attending programs, is through home visits and Jane, a LiL teacher, described the uncomfortable feeling she experienced when knocking on a reluctant parent's door. Jane said she frequently felt uneasy because she was aware that she was imposing her values on other people.

The practitioner insights, based on their observations and experiences, gave an eye-witness version of social behaviours pertinent to LiL and CFC programs. Their insights provided real-life information in the context of contemporary ECEC emphases on inclusion, diversity (Wong & Turner, 2014), parental involvement (Whalley, 2007) and the human rights (Theobald et al., 2013) aim to create social inclusion opportunities for all families

(DEEWR, 2011). ECEC values encompass the right for all people to have the opportunity to learn and participate in education, training and employment, to engage in family life and to have a say in the community (Caruana & McDonald, 2011). Based on human rights ideals, which demand equality, inclusive teaching practices are now expected to ensure fairness is prioritised in the education system (Florian, 2008). The focus on social inclusion now follows the idea of social rights. Social rights involve access and availability of support services as the way to ensure all citizens have an equal opportunity to attain socio-economic wellbeing (Allman, 2013). This notion espouses the idea that people who are excluded are suffering unrealised social rights.

### *7.3.3 Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Goals*

The democratic principle, of a need to ensure equality, drives the policy approach to ensure all citizens have an equal opportunity to succeed in socio-educational and economic pursuits (DEEWR, 2009). Democratic ideas include the right for all, including women with young children, to be free to compete in the workforce to supplement their income (Social Inclusion Principles, Australian Government, 2010). To ensure autonomy is prioritised, however, often requires placing infants and pre-school children in long day childcare, which may affect their future psychosocial wellbeing (Berk, 2013). While Watson and Tully (2008) concede that reciprocal interactive learning is crucial in the early years, they believe that high quality childcare, in conjunction with parental support, can be the most cost beneficial strategy to enhance a child's cognitive developmental outcomes.

On the other hand, one of the main features of LiL and CFC practice is to encourage parent-child bonding as a means to enhance children's wellbeing and inclusion. ECEC services also include long day childcare to cater for the culturally-prescribed expectation of gender equality in the paid workforce (Berk, 2013). An acceptance of long day childcare, for infants and pre-school children, is implicit in the ECEC idea of integrated early childhood services. While the focus is on parental involvement (Whalley, 2007), long day childcare, by its very nature, is unable to facilitate active parent-child proximity-type interactions, which is available within LiL and CFC services. In addressing the main research question, contemporary understandings of social inclusion, in ECEC approaches, incorporate the dual purposes of both encouraging parental involvement and ensuring workplace equality.

The contemporary ECEC approach, therefore, focuses on ensuring the right, for adults, to workforce opportunities and socio-economic success (Social Inclusion principles,



Australian Government, 2010), while upholding the rights of the child (Theobald et al., 2013). It seems that a concentration on parents' rights to equality in paid employment, however, may mean that the child's need to attain a secure attachment experience in infancy is compromised (Bowlby, 1988). The child's right to experience a secure attachment may need priority, because it is during this stage that social trust is acquired and determines whether psychosocial and relationship success will be easily attainable in adulthood (Bowlby, 1988).

The third sub-question relates to ways of enhancing understandings of social inclinations, with which to assist social inclusion strategies and practices in ECEC programs. The most crucial issue, emphasised by all sixteen practitioners, was that of trust. Practitioners stressed the importance of building a trusting relationship immediately when a new family arrived at LiL and/or CFC programs. Another important aspect of ensuring socially inclusive behaviours, most commonly articulated by all practitioners, was the need to address parent-child bonding behaviours. Practitioners talked about the way LiL and CFC programs offered various parent-child bonding sessions to assist parents in ensuring their children experience and maintain feelings of attachment security. LiL teachers, Julie and Sue, and CFC therapist, Tracey, all described strategies they used to encourage parents to interact more appropriately with their children. Claire, a music therapist, described how she visited CFC regularly and used music to subtly encourage parent-child attachments. The various attachment-based strategies, explained in detail by practitioners, were indicative of the contemporary ECEC approaches in strengthening parent-child bonding.

#### *7.3.4 Participating Parents' Shared Understandings*

As this research thesis is based on practitioners' and parents' perspectives in conjunction with social theories, no direct observational analysis of programs was undertaken. The focus of this research was, instead, to analyse the real-life observations and experiences of people who work for, and attend, LiL and CFC programs. The comments of parents, Tess and Monika, for instance, gave a clear understanding of their misgivings when new LiL approaches were instigated. These parents expressed a preference for the more relaxed "play-group" style, rather than being directed into many purposeful, structured activities. The conversations with parents gave an understanding of how these changes impacted on their enjoyment of the LiL programs. LiL parents discussed their unpleasant feelings on being told what to do and given too many directions. For this reason, the informal focus, integral to CFC approaches, was

directly aimed at avoiding being instructive. Inclusion worker, James and therapist, Julie, stated that they were mindful in not making parents feel their behaviours need rectifying.

It may not be a simple question of whether a structured, flexible or casual approach is preferable. This research has found that, while some LiL teachers, like Julie, advocated for a casual impromptu approach, Sue, who taught at another LiL site, seemed to embrace the new structured approach. While interviewing Sue, she described how she diligently implemented the new strategies which had purposeful outcome-based goals. Sue admitted that, in trying to cover all the necessary activities, the programs had become somewhat hectic and disruptive. Nevertheless, while her sessions were very “busy”, Sue expressed a willingness to implement the strategies in the belief that they would produce positive results.

Parents, Nikki and Sarah expressed admiration towards their teacher, Sue, and were keen to follow her directions of embracing the parent-child focus. The conversations with these parents demonstrated their understanding of the need for children to gain socio-educational skills in their early years. Adhering to the early childhood message, parents, Nikki, Sarah, Lana and Sonja articulated their shared values in knowing the importance of attending ECEC programs with their children.

Shared understandings make it easy for people to feel comfortable in new environments (Tieidens & Leach, 2004). This research study revealed that the LiL parents (for example, Nikki and Sarah) had a shared understanding of the outcomes their teacher, Sue, was trying to achieve and were confident of positive results. Other parents/grandparent (Tess, Monika, Miriam, Lana, Sarah and Jack) expressed the same shared understandings of the value of attending programs; that being an expectation of socio-educational benefits for themselves and their children. Overall, the parents involved in this research, showed that they understood and embraced the values of ECEC social inclusion programs.

Bourdieu (1977) points out, however, that it cannot be assumed that everyone has the same social competence to enable them to relate and appropriately respond to the cultural expectations of educational programs. As reflected in the findings of the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute Action Research of Child and Family Centres (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2013), incompatible values and distrust of institutions were the major deterrents to participation for some families. This research has found that reluctant families may be encouraged to regularly attend ECEC programs but this was not, usually, an easy task.

For example, in response to a six-month follow-up email to LiL teacher, Sue, she revealed her success in engaging the family who she first began assisting in an outreach

capacity. She described how the family initially required high levels of assistance with practical matters before they began to regularly engage in the LiL programs. This successful outcome shows that persistence and teacher quality may, albeit with a high investment of time and effort, bring a family to a level where they can eventually feel sufficiently comfortable to regularly participate and engage in the programs.

### *7.3.5 Imparting Social Inclusion Values to Socially Isolated Families*

Reaching isolated families through outreach services is, however, challenging. Although it may be helpful to have information on all families with young children, in order to contact them and invite them to participate in ECEC programs, the issue of them not being able to “fit in” still remains (Nash, 1990). The problem lies in transmitting the school culture to certain family groups for whom this culture is unfamiliar. Families, whose values differ to those of the school culture, may often feel uncomfortable and deterred from attending programs which offer social inclusion benefits (Nash, 1990). Education leader, John, said he was acutely aware of some families in his area, who neither embraced the value of literacy and numeracy, nor wanted to attend personal improvement sessions. John explained that, while these parents did care about their children, their concerns were more about wanting them to have things, such as the latest computers. He said he fully understood the embarrassment, for these families, when in the company of those they perceived as more sensible and organised. Nash (1990) explains that the education system mostly imposes middle-class values and, for this reason, those who do not hold these values can feel excluded.

One striking example of imposing differing values, noted in this research study, was the appearance of the new CFC premises, which were designed with input from the community, government departments and other support agencies. CFC worker, James and education leader, Bridget related how the ultra-stylish premises proved a deterrent to many of the target families. These families, rather than being impressed, appeared intimidated on their initial visit to the centres.

Bourdieu (1990a) adds further understanding by highlighting the way some people can create difficulties for themselves. For example, reticent families, who appear anxious and withdrawn, are less easy for teachers/practitioners to relate to, than those parents and children who appear keen and confident.

Understanding differing social behaviours is an on-going process and LiL teacher, Helen, was perplexed when she noticed that non-participating parents did not appear adept at

networking. For Helen, networking was a natural behaviour, which she commonly observed among the regularly-participating parents. To her surprise, non-engaged parents did not seem to be in the habit of promoting the benefits of the programs to others. Interestingly, the comments of CFC inclusion workers, James and Vanessa, were that they expected parents to promote their programs by word-of-mouth. Helen's observations and insights provided understanding of the differing behavioural habits of reluctant parents compared with those who are keen to attend and want to be involved in social inclusion programs.

The following table shows some differences between reluctant and enthusiastic parents, based on practitioner and parents observations in LiL and CFC programs.

**Table 7: Different Habits of Reluctant and Enthusiastic Parents**

RELUCTANT PARENTS	ENTHUSIASTIC PARENTS
Have difficulties being organised	Able to plan ahead
Fearful of attending events alone	Confident in attending events/programs
Anxious about their children's behaviours	Trusting of their children's behaviours
Find it difficult to mingle in new settings	Able to interpret and respond to social cues and adjust to new social settings
Anxious about feeling rejected/judged	Have high levels of self-efficacy and trust
Have difficulty in acting autonomously	
Anxious about not doing the right thing	Confident about social expectations
Sensitive to perceived slights	Self-assured about their actions
Not in the habit of telling other people about services/supports available	Skilled at networking and recommending the benefits of programs to others

*Information drawn from interview responses of this research study*

### 7.3.6 Understanding Fear and Transitional Stress

An understanding of the differing influences driving social behaviours can be gained from the observations and experiences of the people involved in the study setting (Bourdieu, 1984). Parents and practitioners, for example, recalled the social behaviours they observed and experienced and retold these behaviours from their own perspectives and/or theories. The most common explanation given, as to why some families did not attend LiL and CFC programs, was that it seemed a matter of choice.

The theoretical framework of this thesis examines social decisions from an emotional perspective to add another level of understanding around behaviours which may sometimes appear counter-social. Social theories explain how the need to avoid social rejection may influence the behaviours of people, whose focus is on avoiding the risk of feelings of depression and/or aggression, which may erupt in certain situations (MacDonald & Leary, 2005).

One of the most misunderstood paradoxes of social inclusion is that the disinclination to attend programs, aimed at remedying social isolation, is directly related to a need to avoid feeling rejected in group situations. For this reason, contemporary understandings of the concept of choice may not cover the complexity of what motivates people to participate, or not, in social inclusion programs. LiL teachers, Helen and Jane, for example, observed that people's inclination to withdraw from programs seemed to emanate from fearful emotional feelings, which arose because they seemed unsure of how to behave in an unfamiliar environment. Pleasant or unpleasant feelings are linked to emotions (TenHouten, 2007) and can cause people to avoid unfamiliar social gatherings precisely because of their need to feel included. This phenomenon occurs because of the need to avoid shame, which is aroused when social bonds are perceived to be under threat (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). People, therefore, tend to avoid social gatherings in which they may be at risk of being devalued by others, as this potential sense of rejection can trigger feelings of anxiety.

In examining contemporary understandings of social inclusion and whether ECEC services are addressing the core issues, it may be pertinent to ponder as to why some people are able to cope in new situations while others are not. As is stated in previous chapters, attachment theory provides detailed explanations of how feelings of belonging and rejection develop from very early social learning conditions in infancy (Bowlby, 1988). The issue, highlighted in this thesis, is that feelings of alienation may initially manifest from a malevolent attachment experience and that the resultant feeling of social alienation provides the hallmarks of personality disorders (Sroufe, 2005; Bowlby, 1988).

The key point, regarding the implications of an insecure attachment experience, is that ensuing psychological disorders are, most likely, strongly linked to problematic relationships and ultimate social exclusion (Bowlby, 1988). That is, a person's inability to secure and maintain appropriate relationships may be linked to an insecure attachment experience, from which a lack of trust, extreme neediness/helplessness, inappropriate choice of partners, controlling behaviours and social immaturity can evolve (Howe, 2005).

A deeper understanding of the manifestations of an insecure attachment style, however, is not meant as a way to label non-participating parents or causally explain their disinclination to attend support programs. Nevertheless, Bowlby (1988) suggests that psychosocial disorders, in adulthood, can be analysed backwards as they are usually a reflection of one's earliest social endeavours/encounters.

As the practitioners in the study noted, the main deterrent in being socially included, for many people, was their lack of social trust. Attachment theory provides understanding of how this may occur; that is, those who have experienced an anxious/avoidant attachment style in childhood can fail to develop certain levels of trust making them unable to disclose their needs and be at high risk of social isolation (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Trust is, therefore, a significant issue in terms of when, and how, it can be attained during life. As Bowlby (1988) suggests, an early foundation of mistrust can impinge, in various degrees, on all social relationships and interactions post-infancy.

Contemporary acceptance of the critical early childhood stage informs the efforts of early childhood social inclusion strategies to ensure parent-child bonding (DEEWR, 2009). The challenge is, however, to ensure that dominant cultural and political ideas operate with an understanding to support, rather than sabotage this process (Green & Scholes, 2004). The ideas of Bronfenbrenner (1974), for example, propose that it is not one, but multiple transitions, which are of equal importance in life. Following this notion, Gordon and Browne (2011) expect that practitioners' inclusive practices, in early educational settings, can help children deal with transitions.

An understanding of attachment theory and the sociology of emotions provides clarity to explain how transition-related over-reactive behaviour may be more a symptom of already-present emotional regulation difficulties (Ladd et al., 2006). More understanding may, therefore, be helpful in explaining why some people seem able to deal with transitions while others are not. For instance, some people seem more equipped to control anxiety and do not become overwhelmed by uncontrollable impulses, fear of punishment and acute anxiety when stress occurs (Bowlby, 1979).

The key is in a person's emotional regulation ability, which becomes evident at times of stress, especially when huge transitional change occurs. Change and stress, therefore, expose the true nature of a person's inability to regulate their emotions. An inability to self-regulate can ignite feelings of shame and confusion, leaving the sufferer struggling to cope, because their shame prevents them from seeking support (Bowlby, 1979).

### *7.3.7 The Issue of Parenting Skills*

A major aspect of social and emotional wellbeing, highlighted in this research study, was the high incidences of people needing assistance with their parenting skills. While LiL teacher, Julie, and CFC therapist, Tracey, prioritised the need to assist parents with their children's social behaviours, Julie and CFC workers, Raelene and Nellie, also spoke of a worrying trend. They had observed increasing numbers of children being diagnosed with disorders, such as ADHD, for which they were often prescribed medication to regulate reactive behaviours. LiL teacher, Julie, often collaborated with CFC workers, Raelene and Nellie, all of whom expressed their concerns towards the increasing medicalisation of children's behavioural problems. T

The testimonies of practitioners revealed a trend to medicalise children, who displayed inappropriate social behaviours, rather than acknowledging the link between parenting practices and the child's oppositional behaviours (Denham, 2006; Ladd et al., 2006). While LiL and CFCs offer assistance with parent-child bonding, another program, aimed at assisting parents develop secure attachments with their children (Aylward & McNeill, 2009), paradoxically recommends that parents be taught to utilise childcare.

According to Scott (2012), the main obstacle in understanding social inclusion, for contemporary approaches, is the assumption that reactive social behaviour is fifty per cent inherited. He advocates for more understanding and acceptance of the way parenting style impacts on children's behaviours and emotions. LiL teacher, Julie, was concerned that so many parents seemed to be seeking a medical diagnosis to explain their child's lack of emotional regulation skills. Julie has written booklets about parenting after so many parents had despairingly sought her help in guiding their pre-school children's social behaviours. Similarly, CFC therapist, Tracey, when discussing her work at several centres, described how she observed a rising prevalence of "passive parenting"; that is, more parents are observed as lacking an ability to provide boundaries for their children.

The difficulty in addressing sensitive issues, such as parenting behaviours, has led Tracey to utilise various low-key methods to introduce specialised programs and to ensure parents are not singled out from the main group. At one CFC centre, practitioners described a voluntary parenting program where videos are used to enable parents to see how their responses effect their child's reactions. Nellie and Raelene, who worked at this centre,

strongly emphasised that parents were not directed to participate in these potentially confronting sessions but could choose to attend if, and when, they felt ready.

This scenario helps to provide understanding of the differences that exist between parents with high levels of self-confidence, who are able to cope with critical self-reflection, in comparison with others, who may be in denial or have a tendency to minimise their unhelpful behaviours (Bowlby, 1988).

The issue of parenting style was always approached in a sensitive way by ECEC practitioners, who were vigilant in ensuring that parents did not feel inadequate or humiliated. Teachers and practitioners were generally skilled in being able to appreciate the way in which emotional issues affect behaviour. Nevertheless, emotionally-based issues can often be overlooked, because school-based attachment-related implications are rarely found in the literature, despite widespread knowledge that the parent-child dyad impacts on social behaviours (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004).

Contemporary understandings of social inclusion may, therefore, gain from acknowledging the way early attachment experience has an impact on all relationships (Bowlby, 1988). Similarly, practitioners may benefit from increased understanding of their own Internal Working Model (IWM) in order to enhance their sensitivity and understanding of children's and parents' behaviours (Bowlby, 1982; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004).

It is widely understood that social behaviours are expressed in the way a person relates to others and how this behaviour is perceived (Gordon & Browne, 2011). This thesis, however, advocates for more emphasis of the emotional bases of social behaviors within contemporary social inclusion dialogue. For example, misunderstandings can occur if it is assumed that behavioural patterns are a trait/disorder residing in the individual. This psychological view proposes that the way a person responds to others is half related to their inherited traits, and that these traits determine their adherence, or not, to social norms (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). This thesis has endeavoured to promote a more realistic estimation of the emotional basis of social behaviours; that is, that social inclusion is a two-way simultaneous process, involving self-perception and expectations of others' responses (Tiedens & Leach, 2004).

Drawing on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1982), this doctoral thesis explores a more in-depth understanding of this process, in explaining how the child's "way of being" becomes the adult person's *modus operandi* in negotiating social situations.



### *7.3.8 Connecting Theories with Data*

All practitioners and regularly-attending parents, involved in this study, spoke enthusiastically about the overwhelming benefits to be gained from participating in LiL and CFC programs. They all expressed an understanding of how activities, community-integrated services, social access and educational and learning opportunities, have enhanced their children's socio-educational wellbeing. The interviews with practitioners and discussions with parents indicated that more understanding may be required to address the reasons why many families, for whom the programs are targeted, are not inclined to attend. The theoretical framework of this research thesis explores a more nuanced understanding of the socio-emotional obstacles deterring some families from participating in support programs.

It may be perplexing to comprehend why some people do not take advantage of the easily accessible, highly resourced and tastefully designed settings, offering links to various supports and training opportunities, and facilitated by skilled, encouraging and helpful staff. From a cognitive position, there appears no reason why families with pre-school children would not embrace these supports immediately on being informed of the chance to strengthen their social networks and enhance their children's educational and future socio-economic wellbeing. When approaching this issue from an attachment-related view of social and emotional wellbeing, it appears that cognitive explanations may be operating under an assumption that all people are already socially inclined.

Understanding the socio-emotional aspects of social behaviours assists in knowing that some people respond more to their emotional feelings, which appear a stronger sway than their cognition of future benefits. From a cognitive point of view, it would seem sensible for practitioners to go out and visit isolated families to enlighten them, in person, of the rewards and benefits of attending programs. LiL teacher Sue, seemed to be achieving success, albeit with only one family and after a huge investment of time and effort. Another LiL teacher, Jane, spoke about her door-knocking experiences as being very unpleasant. Jane felt acutely aware that she represented a middle-class person standing of the doorstep preaching to parents on what they "should" be doing. Education leader, Penny, discussed another challenge for practitioners when conducting outreach work. She talked about the risk, for practitioners, when visiting families who may have mental health, family violence and drug/alcohol abuse issues. John, another education leader, was sceptical of policy makers and suggested that they usually have no idea of the issues facing disadvantaged families in

his area. He noted that decisions on strategies, aimed at assisting these families, were usually irrelevant to the obstacles they faced in reality.

A key issue, arising from the interviews in this research, was that many parents seemed to demonstrate very low levels of personal power. The issue of self-autonomy, being the ability to assert oneself and feel worthy of help and support (Bowlby, 1979), may be another factor requiring more understanding. As Bourdieu (1999) states, most disadvantaged people are as unaware of the reasons for their struggles as are the privileged in envisaging the impact of their dominant ideas on others.

This thesis has found that contemporary understandings of the essence of social inclusion may have blurred the differences between the concepts of socialisation and acculturation. That is, discrimination, in terms of socialisation, refers to the disadvantage occurring for a person who lacks the social skills necessary for maintaining appropriate relationships and regulating emotions; this being is a cross-cultural issue. Conversely, acculturation refers to global discrimination being attributed to people, because of their socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and culturally-defined group status. Ultimately, a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the complexities of people's lives, and the multiplicity of historico/socio/cultural and emotional factors that contribute to this complexity, would be helpful for ECEC approaches.

More understanding has been sought, in this research, by exploring the way some parents will avoid social settings, because of fears of rejection, especially when the territoriality of established parents is expressed strongly in their antagonistic body language. Two teachers, Helen and Julie, remarked that, while most teachers and practitioners have specialised training and skills, they need to understand the impact of their responses towards children and parents. They added that practitioners require a degree of personal insight, in recognising how their body language affects others. Julie believed practitioners need to possess a natural propensity to understand and respond, creatively and in an impromptu manner, to varied group situations and family needs on a daily basis.

## CONCLUSION

By exploring the research findings in terms of the theoretical framework, this chapter has addressed the question around contemporary understandings of social inclusion within ECEC programs. While a major ECEC goal is to assist children with self-regulation (Moffitt et al., 2011), Bowlby (1979) explains that this skill relates to emotional development within the

attachment process. Without these early acquired social dispositions, a person can suffer discrimination if they do not possess the requisite social responses (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieuian and Bowlbian theories are helpful in understanding that, rather than economic disadvantage *per se*, feelings of social inclusion relate to being able to interpret unwritten rules in social situations (Bourdieu, 1999; Bowlby, 1988). In exploring contemporary understandings of social inclusion, this chapter has highlighted the mistake of assuming that all people exercise a rational choice. Bowlby (1969/1982, 1979) provides clarity in stating that the issue is more about an ability to adopt abstract attitudes and, for this reason, it cannot be assumed that every person has the imagination and self-esteem to behave autonomously. This thesis seeks to highlight how people, who suffer social problems, may merely be reacting in terms of their early-learned, emotionally-based social experiences (Bowlby, 1988).

Understanding how different ideas have evolved involves deciphering between the psychological idea; that emotions exist in the individual, and the sociological notion; that emotions require another person to trigger these responses (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Further misunderstandings relate to the difference between the idea of socialisation and acculturation (Gaskins, 2013). Bourdieu (1990a) claims that understanding of the real nature of social inclusion can be found by seeking knowledge about what really motivates people to act. He says the best way to gain understanding is by talking to the people who live and work in the study setting (Bourdieu, 1984). For this reason, this research study has sought information from practitioners and parents involved in LiL and CFCs, the subject of this research.

The interviews and theories, informing this research, reveal that the issue of social inclusion encompasses many intangible, non-cognitive influences, such as body language, emotional regulation ability, self-esteem (autonomy) and trust (Bowlby, 1988; Bourdieu, 1990b). This research also explores how contemporary understandings of social inclusion issues develop from outcomes of recent historical practices, which in turn, impact on changing ideas around parenting, discrimination and ECEC purposes. Historical and prevailing cultural ideas all culminate in contemporary ECEC approaches, where the aim is now to reduce disadvantage by adhering to the principles of democracy and human rights.

The following chapter draws together some of the key elements of the thesis to provide a summary of the study and the research implications.

## CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSIONS

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In summary, this thesis has explored the issue of social inclusion and how this concept is understood within contemporary ECEC approaches, particularly LiL and CFCs in Tasmania. The theoretical framework has utilised theories which explain societal issues around social dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984) as well as attachment foundations of social learning in the individual (Bowlby, 1988). Further examinations of the influences of emotions on behaviour have been sought from Tiedens and Leach (2004), TenHouten (2007) and Allman (2013). Bowlby's (1969/1982) ideas align with Allman's (2013); that is, psychosocial distress emanates from social disconnectedness because of the survival aspect of social inclusion. Incorporating understanding of emotions contrasts with the contemporary social inclusion focus on individual autonomy, liberty and reducing discrimination of marginalised groups (Wong & Turner, 2014; Theobald et al., 2013). In conclusion, the key issues in examining the emotional aspects of social inclusion within contemporary ECEC approaches are to:

- Consider how a person's social behaviour may elicit discrimination
- Seek understanding by asking people who live and work in the study setting
- Ensure ethical practices when studying social behaviour
- Find a philosophy to explain what is happening, now, regarding social inclusion
- Acknowledge the different perceptions of cognition, choice and emotions
- Understand the difference between socialisation and acculturation
- Consider the impact of historical practices on contemporary ECEC approaches
- Accept the complex nature of the emotional aspects of social behaviours
- Unravel the anomalies created by conflicting understandings of social inclusion
- Examine the reality of social inclusion/exclusion in the context of cultural values
- Note how social skills/autonomy relate to feeling comfortable in unfamiliar settings

This thesis highlights that contemporary ideas may not always align with acknowledgement of the emotionally-based aspects of children's wellbeing, as a way to prevent an escalation of adulthood psychosocial problems. (Bowlby, 1988). In conclusion, it seems that more understanding of the way social dispositions are acquired may assist in pinpointing the obstacles which may inhibit social inclusion. Even though values of equal opportunity and human rights are promoted as adhering to democratic principles (Theobald et al., 2013;

Florian, 2008), this thinking may not account for the way a person's social behaviours can actually be a source of discrimination and social exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984).

This thesis supports Bourdieu's (1984) advice that the most authentic way to gauge what is really happening is to ask practitioners and parents about their experiences within the study setting. The methodological approach, taken for this thesis, has been explained as well as the reasons for not attempting to quantitatively measure and evaluate emotionally-based behaviours. This thesis has highlighted the complexity of examining the concept of social inclusion, including the risks of confusing socialisation and acculturation (Gaskins, 2013) and determining whether feeling socially included is a state or a process (Silver, 2010). The way the concept of social inclusion is understood may depend on one's philosophical stance. For this research, the philosophical view, taken, is that the mind is emotional and unmeasurable as opposed to the physicality of the brain (Schuh & Barab, 2007). As such, although inexorably connected, the mind and brain are perceived as also separate.

A more nuanced understanding of the concept of social inclusion may be sourced by considering that, although cognitive learning may be measurable, it may not account for emotional issues. Emotions, being unmeasurable, may need to be observed and linked with theories to explain how certain behaviours occur (Bourdieu, 1990a; Goleman, 2007).

Ethical considerations framed the decision not to ask reluctant parents to participate in this research study. LiL teacher, Jane's description of feeling intrusive and patronising when trying to cajole parents to attend social inclusion programs, provides an example of the ethical dilemma which arises upon trying to persuade people to engage in potentially judgmental interrogation (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

The methodological approach for this research, therefore, consisted of interviewing practitioners and parents, who were involved in ECEC services, to gain knowledge of the way social inclusion is understood within these programs. The conversations with participating parents showed their high levels of confidence in being able to integrate and cope in new social groups/settings. Both practitioners and parents expressed a view that social behaviour seemed to be a matter of free choice. Although the Social Inclusion Agenda (Australian Government, 2010) assumes that choice is implicit in ECEC participation, Bourdieu's (1990a) view, and that of TenHouten's (2007), is that rational choice is a post-Enlightenment idea. This thesis has explained how rational choice thinking seems to emanate from capitalist values, of competition and hyper-individualism, in supposing that all people can rationally calculate means and ends (Green & Scholes, 2004).

Conversely, contemporary understandings of social inclusion, as a cognitive choice, seem to relate to the pre-Enlightenment idea that reason and emotions are separate entities (Green & Scholes, 2004; TenHouten, 2007). Neither the post-Enlightenment assumption, that reason (cognition) and science can uncover and overcome emotions (feelings), nor the pre-Enlightenment notion, that reason (the mind) and emotion (the body) are separate, seem to account for the emotional, survival element of feeling social included. Drawing on the theoretical framework, this thesis has highlighted how the need to avoid rejection and transitional stress appears related to one's earliest social experiences (Bowlby, 1979, 1988; TenHouten, 2007).

In seeking more understanding of the emotional influences of behaviour this research has also examined the impact of Australia's historico-cultural practices on social inclusion outcomes. Historically-based cyclical outcomes indicate how early childhood separation appears highly detrimental to psychosocial wellbeing (Higgins, 2010; NSDC, 2015). Similarly, prevailing cultural ideas, which prioritise competitive economic pursuits (Kasser et al., 2007; Offer 2006; Green & Scholes, 2004) seem uncondusive to inclusivity and cooperation.

This thesis has explored the complexity of social enquiry (Bourdieu, 1990a) and explains how the concept of social inclusion may be perceived in various ways. Differing understandings about the concept of social inclusion can include a focus on symptoms, such as unemployment, poverty, substance abuse and loss of community spirit and respect (Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania report, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009). Contemporary understandings concentrate on social inclusion values, such as democratic principles, espousing a need to reduce discrimination around gender, identity and power imbalances (Theobald et al., 2013).

Social inclusion values are purported to be about fairness, respect, equal opportunity and the right to be heard (Silver, 2010). These values are promoted even though the concept of social inclusion appears vague, particularly in deciphering whether it is a state or a process (Silver, 2010). Long (2010) discusses social inclusion as both an absolute term; being a way to enhance social participation, and as a relative notion; dependent on a person's social dispositions being autonomous. The contemporary assumption is that children are already autonomous and, therefore, able to plan and make decisions (Whalley, 2007). Similarly, students are viewed as possessing insight, critical thinking, problem-solving and self-analysis capabilities (Rancière, 2007; Kincheloe, 2011).

Contemporary thinking often assumes that genes account for fifty per cent of one's personality (Scott, 2012). Experiences affect the way genes are expressed in the nervous system, and, therefore, genetics may not be responsible for social behaviour (Hawley, 2000). Rather than behavioural traits being inherited, the expression of genes is significantly facilitated by parenting practices (Scott, 2012). In contrast, being autonomous and feeling socially included are acquired social dispositions, which are cultivated in early childhood (Bourdieu, 1984; Bowlby, 1969/1982). Feeling socially included is, therefore, relative to whether a person has developed the requisite social style, manners, taste and *élan* (Bourdieu, 1984).

From an individual perspective social inclusion has been explained as being dependent on one's IWM, which develops in infancy (Bowlby, 1982). That is, the main determinants, of an ability to be socially included, are imagination and abstract thinking abilities. These capabilities need to be absorbed early, because they are required in knowing how to behave socially. That is, emotional regulation ability and social cue interpretation skills are necessary to enable appropriate reactions to unwritten social rules (Bowlby, 1969/1982). These early acquired socio-emotional skills are linked to self-esteem, feeling worthy of support and expectations of fairness and respect (Bowlby, 1979). Without this sense of personal power (Cooley, 1902), a person's lack of self-confidence (autonomy) can contribute to their social isolation (Kenney & Kennedy, 2004).

Nevertheless, there seems to be variations on how the attachment process is perceived. Bronfenbrenner (1976), a proponent of the scientific experimental method, argues that many attachment experiences are equally influential over the lifespan. This idea differs from Bowlby's (1969/1982, 1988) claims around the primacy of the attachment process. Based on rigorous observational and clinical research, his findings reveal that a child's early proximity-seeking experiences have an indelible effect on all their future social encounters. Bowlby's (1969/1982, 1988) theory, now substantiated by biological findings (Riley, 2011), explains that the child needs to feel the proximity and protection of their primary caregiver, during the pre-verbal stage of life. Without these early-acquired feelings of protection and proximity, the child is at risk of future psychosocial problems and social isolation.

Despite biological evidence (Riley, 2011) attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) continues to be critiqued as a neoliberal, individualistic, capitalist and gender-specific ploy, which follows the dictates of nature and neglects the socio-economic needs of the caregiver (Duschinsky et al., 2015). Wearing (1984) equates attachment theory with capitalism; while

Cleary (1999) states that it is anachronistic and radically individualistic. Silver (2010) suggests that the conservative Liberal party focuses too much on upbringing issues and economic rationalism. The term neo-liberalism, however, refers to a reliance on market processes and does not necessarily equate with conservatism (Levin & Greenwood, 2011). Moreover, the idea of conservatism has also been construed as a means of linking science with contemporary cultural ideas, such as the genetic attribution of personality traits (Karen, 1998; Lewontin et al., 1984; Bowlby, 1951).

Green and Scholes (2004) suggest that attachment theory cannot be equated with western hyper-individualism. Similarly Offer (2006) and Kasser et al. (2007) argue that it is neo-liberal values of competitiveness and individualism that are dismissing the effects of unhelpful parenting and non-committed relationships. Nevertheless, the effects of historical cultural practices seem to indicate that attachment security issues may need more attention.

Historical practices show the generational psychosocial effects of parental separations of Indigenous children (NSDC, 2015) and many others affected by past adoption practices (Higgins, 2010). These detrimental effects seem to be on-going with current evidence showing increasing incidents of depression and anxiety in Australian children (Lawrence et al., 2015; AEDC, 2016). To combat these worrying trends, ECEC services are now operating as a means to enhance social inclusion rates in Australia (Vinson, 2009).

This thesis has focussed on gaining the perspectives of practitioners and parents involved in two ECEC programs operating in Tasmania, Australia, namely LiL and CFCs. Contemporary ideas, in Australia, promote ECEC programs as a social welfare, cost-saving initiative based on favourable reports from the US and UK (McDonald, 2011). These reports inspire the idea that participation in early childhood/family support programs, incorporating social inclusion strategies, can be both a cost-saving measure and a way to reduce disadvantage (Gordon & Browne, 2011). Contemporary ECEC approaches are based on evidence correlating improved childhood literacy and education with adult wellbeing and inclusion in the workplace (DEEWR, 2009).

Although benefiting from these programs, the regular-participating families are, for the most part, already in possession of social inclusion qualities (Allman, 2013). Studies show that, although some families may seek help for urgent matters, many are not inclined to attend programs offering social and educational supports (Blakemore et al., 2009). In this research study, the testimonies of education leader, John, revealed that many families seem disinterested in programs to help with literacy or self-improvement. Moreover, Vinson (2009)



adds that there is a risk in linking literacy skills directly with socio-economic success, because the major factor contributing to poor outcomes appears to be emotionally-based social difficulties.

Social inclusion issues have been examined, in this thesis, by proposing a link between social inclination and attachment experience. This is not a novel proposal, because many ECEC services, such as the one studied by Aylward and McNeill (2009), have a specific attachment agenda. Their study shows, however, that parents are mostly reticent in attending, and this is reflected in other studies of parenting programs showing only moderate success in encouraging the target families to participate (Blakemore et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2005). Parents seem easily deterred from attending any programs which hint of parenting training because they are felt as controlling and directive (Coyne, 2013). Different family values and practices seem to affect participation, as was found in the second phase of a study of CFCs, conducted by Murdoch University (Education Department, Tasmania, 2013). To address participation issues and increase family engagement, ECEC strategies are now encompassing ways to establish trusting relationships.

The only solution, according to Watson and Tully (2008), is to strengthen the relationship between practitioners and parents, starting immediately after the birth of a child and with consistent, regular home visiting. Ultimately, encouraging social inclusion within contemporary ECEC approaches requires that practitioners assist families with practical issues, behave in a non-judgmental way and offer flexible support services.

The practitioners in this research study were aware of the obstacles of transport, especially for parents with more than one child under school age. James, an inclusion worker, noticed that proximity to the CFCs did not, however, guarantee that those families would attend. CFC worker, Raelene, stated that morning programs were easier, because many parents indicated the difficulty they had in bringing very young children and babies to the centres in the afternoon. Parents with several young children seemed to experience difficulties in being organised, as CFC worker, James and LiL teacher Julie, observed. Another CFC worker, Vanessa, noted that parents seemed to respond more to being given a set time, rather than an open option where they might lapse from attending. In this research, both practitioners and parents unanimously stated that they were aware that the families, who regularly attended, were not the families for whom the programs were originally intended. The main determinant for participation seemed to be whether families were able to feel comfortable in an unfamiliar setting and socially equipped to mingle within a new group.

Nevertheless, the contemporary ECEC idea is that these programs need to be specifically implemented for families who may be marginalised from mainstream society (Caruana & McDonald, 2011; DEEWR, 2009). All parents and practitioners, involved in this research, expressed a need to encourage the most socially isolated families to participate regularly in LiL and CFC support programs. During the interviews, three parents, Miriam, Tess and Monika, suggested that more desirable incentives may be needed to encourage reluctant families to participate in LiL and CFC services. The incentive of free uniforms was only marginally successful in promoting regular LiL participation but, as John noted, the offer of free laptops encouraged nearly all of his reluctant parents to turn up for an evening session.

The contemporary ECEC focus is on inclusion and diversity (Wong & Turner, 2014), individual autonomy, parental involvement (Whalley, 2007) and human rights, equality and fairness (Theobald et al., 2013). Inherent in ECEC strategies is an acceptance that early childhood attachment security is important (Whalley, 2007). At the same time, however, attachment theory is also derided as being linked to anti-equality ideas (Duschinsky et al., 2015, Cleary, 1999). Although the contemporary ECEC purpose is to promote equality and fairness, these qualities are assumed as being socially constructed (Theobald et al., 2013; Silver, 2010) rather than needing to be cultivated in the first few months of life (Bowlby, 1979). Thus, the contemporary understanding of the way to promote equality and fairness differs from Bowlby's (1979) suggestion that expectations of fairness and respect relate to a secure attachment experience in infancy.

This thesis has explored the way habits (dispositions) are acquired through early childhood experiences and interactions (Bowlby, 1988; Bourdieu, 1984). When acknowledging the difference between socialisation and acculturation, contemporary notions of discrimination seem to refer more to external issues, such as ethnicity, gender, disability or economic status. As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, assigning discrimination to specific groups assumes that these are entities and not comprised of individuals with specific dispositions. The proposal of the doctoral thesis is that discrimination occurs predominantly when one's social dispositions, being mannerisms, manners and taste, are perceived by the mainstream as socially unacceptable (Bourdieu, 1984). Understanding this aspect of social behaviour is, however, not a simple matter to be viewed simplistically (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Social inclusion is a contemporary policy goal with an expectation that Australian children will acquire social skills before commencing mainstream schooling (Caruana &

McDonald, 2011). The purpose of LiL and CFC programs is, therefore, to ensure parents and their children are able integrate into the community rather than being socially isolated (DEEWR, 2009).

As ECEC programs provide assistance for many families in Tasmania, the aim of this thesis is to support, and not critique, LiL and CFC services. The critique, however, is principally directed at the way social inclusion is perceived and understood. Namely, that a reliance on cognitive learning does not seem to account for the more powerful influence on social inclinations; that of emotions (Allman, 2013; Riley, 2011; TenHouten, 2007; Tiedens & Leach, 2004; LeDoux, 1996; Bourdieu, 1999; Bowlby, 1979). Rather than adhering to a socio-cultural constructionist view of life, where social behaviour is perceived as instrumentally motivated towards future economic goals (TenHouten, 2007; LeDoux, 1996; Bourdieu, 1999), the thesis has sought more understanding of socio-emotional aspect of socially inclusive behaviour.

While democratic ideals of fairness and equality frame contemporary ECEC approaches, the need to enhance critical thinking and emotional regulation is also acknowledged (Theobald et al., 2013; Moffitt et al., 2011). Bowlby (1982) argues, however, that respect, trust and social inclusion are actually dependent on one's emotional regulation ability, but that these potentialities need to develop in the pre-verbal stage of life. Based on Bowlby's (1982) perspective, it is beholden on contemporary ECEC approaches to ensure that children's attachment needs are prioritised, because this process forms the foundation of their future emotional wellbeing.

A cognitive view of democratic values (Cohen et al., 2007), however, may omit the influence of emotional triggers when understanding social inclusion (TenHouten, 2007). In this thesis, contemporary social policies have been explored by taking into account the way historical practices and prevailing cultural ideas impact on people's social lives over the generations (Bourdieu, 1984; Bowlby, 1988).

This research thesis has examined historical practices and policies as contributing to generational habits, which may be impacting on the social inclusion status of many families in Australia. Prior to the 1970s, for instance, Australian government policies encouraged committed relationships by offering incentives, like cheap home purchase opportunities for couples (Lewis, 2000), and during this time single-parenthood was discouraged and widespread adoptions of children condoned. Recent historical practices included the removal of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children from their familial environs. The consequential

adoption and institutionalisation of these children led to generational social and mental health problems (NSDC, 2015; Higgins, 2010). Nowadays, welfare benefits provide single parents with rental accommodation and income support but, at the same time, the prevailing cultural priority is for economic equality, diversity and social inclusion (Theobald et al., 2013).

The contemporary focus, on ensuring equality of economic earning, however, also necessitates the separation of very young children from their primary caregiver and into childcare services (Bowlby, 1988). A focus on economic equality may, therefore, omit realisation of the child's need to feel a sense of proximity to their primary caregiver, according to Bowlby (1988). He also stresses that the parenting task is a physically and emotionally-relentless occupation, which can be more challenging for a single parent without strong support networks. This thesis has explored the contemporary ECEC focus on promoting social inclusion, but emphasises the importance of gaining social skills, which relate to an early-acquired ability to interpret social cues, empathise and regulate emotions in various social situations (Bowlby, 1988; Sroufe, 2005; Crittenden, 2005; Ladd et al., 2006; Scott, 2012).

## 8.1 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The challenge for contemporary social inclusion approaches may be that a focus on individual autonomy, cognitive learning and logical thinking operates under the presumption that everyone is socially inclined, and omits the more powerful influence of emotions on social behaviours (TenHouten, 2007; Tiedens & Leach, 2004). This thesis has highlighted how emotional influences relate to a person's attachment experience, which exerts a major influence on their social behaviour (Bowlby, 1988). The issue of emotions has implications in how research on social behaviour and social inclusion is understood and examined. By encompassing multi-disciplinary ideas, educational research can capture a wider sphere of social behavioural explanations, which may be unavailable when concentrating solely on the psychological tradition.

For example, the sociology of emotions may be helpful if utilised in educational studies when reliance is usually placed on examining cognitive issues around learning. The issue of emotions as a survival mechanism may bring added knowledge when seeking to examine social behaviours in educational settings.

As Bowlby (1979) suggests learning theorists concentrate too much on the cognitive tradition and operant conditioning responses without acknowledging the part played by

emotions in shaping social behaviours. The issue of being able to adopt abstract attitudes (Bowlby, 1951) and engage in imaginative, pretend play (Vygotsky, 1978; Seifert, 2006) is another area, in education research, where children are assumed to have already acquired these skills. It may be the case that it cannot be presumed that all children are critical thinkers, able to plan and make decisions, as Whalley (2007) suggests. Others, for example, Rancière (2007) and Kincheloe (2011), also embrace the idea that children are all able to problem-solve and self-analyse. When examining the issue of trust, as an emotionally-based survival response, it appears that abstract reasoning and emotional regulation abilities need to be acquired early so as to prevent transitional and relationship stress (Bowlby, 1951).

Similarly, a reliance on experimental design to gain statistical evidence of social trends may not capture the influence of emotions on behaviours (Hartas, 2009; TenHouten, 2007). In regards to methodology, rather than seeking to gain quantitative measurable indices, it is considered more helpful to simply ask the practitioners about patterns of behaviour they observe in educational settings (Bourdieu, 1984). Practitioners have specialised knowledge because they spend large amounts of time with huge populations of children and parents. Practitioners, like John, who have grown up in the community, are a particularly rich source of information regarding the impact of educational approaches on children and their families.

A key research implication, for this thesis, is to understand the importance of social inclusion, because a lack of this sense of social security can manifest, in varying degrees, in complex psychosocial dysfunction (Bowlby, 1988). The implications of acknowledging the emotional influences driving social inclusion are timely, in considering recent evidence showing high incidents of psychosocial emotional problems in Australian children (Lawrence, et al., 2015; AEDC, 2016).

A major implication, for educational research study, is that ECEC approaches may need to cater for those families who are disinclined to attend programs. The main issues, therefore, appears to be overcoming parents' uncomfortable feelings in unfamiliar environments (Blakemore et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2005). LiL teacher, Sue, proved that it is possible for a family to begin to feel comfortable if they can be encouraged to maintain regular attendance in programs. CFC workers, James and Vanessa, and education leader, June, all noted that a trusting relationship needs to be established with families who may be at risk of feeling uncomfortable.

### *8.1.1 Purpose to Highlight Emotional Influences*

In addressing the research question, this thesis has examined contemporary understandings of social inclusion by emphasising how some people's emotionally-based social dispositions may be implicit in them feeling comfortable, or not, in their relationships with other people/groups. This knowledge is considered important in the context of contemporary ECEC strategies, such as LiL and CFC programs, which have been implemented in response to a need to facilitate social inclusion, especially in Tasmania where rates of exclusion are high (Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009).

The theoretical orientation of this thesis places the sociological concept of a need for societal cohesion alongside the psychological focus on the psyche (mind), which Bowlby (1988) claims is pre-programmed, in all humans, towards social interaction. This inclination may be hindered, however, by emotional reactions elicited by early-acquired social experiences, which can render social encounters as stressful, rather than pleasant considerations (Bowlby, 1988).

This thesis, therefore, invites a more nuanced understanding of social inclusion, to take into account the idea that social propensity and/or dysfunction occurs during the pre-verbal stage of infancy where a secure attachment experience ensures on-going social confidence and emotional resilience. A deeper understanding of the emotional implications of being socially included, or not, may assist social policy ideas and ECEC approaches in their goal to reduce discrimination and enhance societal wellbeing.

The theoretical framework, of this thesis, highlights a challenge for social policy and ECEC approaches in ensuring parents' rights to economic equality alongside their children's right to an early foundation of socio-emotional flourishing. It is suggested that the issue, needing more understanding, is the significance of parenting style on children's behaviours. That is, early-acquired social skills are necessary to negotiate all social relationships and ensure socio-emotional wellbeing for adult life and future generations.

This thesis has explained how social skills need to develop from the earliest of childhood social experiences (Bowlby, 1979) and encompass body language behaviours. As Bourdieu (1984) explains, body language involves ways of speaking, behaving, walking, tone of voice and taste and a myriad of complex inclinations, not simply learned/acquired through instructional means.

### *8.1.2 Limitations of the Research*

The limitations of this qualitative research are in the small sample number. Fortunately, the population of Tasmania is relatively small and the study has been able to adequately cover the three major areas of LiL and CFC services, namely, southern, northern and north-western Tasmania. By covering three areas, designated as low SES in Tasmania, it was possible to gain a reasonable representation of the study sample, especially with practitioners being able to relate their observations of many parents and children over time.

Another limitation is that parents who were reluctant to attend LiL and CFCs, and are the subject of much of the study discussions, were not included in the research sample. As explained in chapter 4, ethical reasons were implicit in the decision not to include reluctant parents and, in keeping with Bourdieu's (1990a) theory that people are mostly unaware of the reasons for their struggles. Similarly, Bowlby (1988) argues that people can be in denial and loath to discuss parenting or behavioural issues, especially if they feel they may be judged unfavourably. This research is, therefore, limited because of the ethical need to avoid causing real or potential harm to vulnerable people (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

A major difficulty for this social research was to examine the emotional bases of social behaviours. Nevertheless, this research was able to document patterns of behaviours, which were observed by the people most involved in the study setting (Bourdieu, 1984). This qualitative study has highlighted that more understanding of the emotional basis of social inclusion may be needed within contemporary ECEC approaches.

### *8.1.3 More Questions – Suggested Further Research*

This research study has emphasised that a major issue, for people experiencing social exclusion, is their need to avoid uncomfortable emotional feelings and anxiety when in unfamiliar social settings. Contemporary policy and ECEC approaches may, therefore, benefit from gaining understanding of the emotional problems underlying the feelings of social rejection, which cause sufferers to avoid certain social situations. The information gained from this research suggests that social inclusion requires social skills and inclination, in the understanding that this process operates between people, not just within the individual (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Furthermore, if it is accepted that attachment security plays a major part in the ability to negotiate social situations, make friends, maintain appropriate relationships and regulate emotions sufficiently to be able to feel comfortable in a variety of social situations ((Ladd et al., 2006; Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Denham, 2006; Seifert, 2006;

Schore, 2001; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Bowlby 1973, 1982), the questions needing to be asked are, (1) What are the obstacles in ensuring all children experience the optimum secure attachment in infancy and the pre-school years and (2) How can ECEC approaches and social inclusion policy and practice assist in this endeavour?

Further research around attachment-based emotional influences, may need to include a comparison of various cross-cultural parenting practices and the respective relationship outcomes in these societies. In the present day, there are difficulties in studying infants, because of the potential of unethical researcher intrusion and/or video surveillance of children in long day childcare or in households.

Contrastingly, Bowlby (1951) was able to observe the behaviours of infants and parents, as well as very young children, who resided in orphanages. He states that the best way to gain evidence on the emotional-bases of social behaviours is by direct observations in institutions, schools and hospitals, combined with investigating personal histories and conducting follow-up studies of those who have experienced early social deprivation. Additionally, Bourdieu (1990a) advises that the researcher needs to talk to people who work in the environment being studied.

Attachment theory features strongly in this thesis, because it explicitly explains how emotions are connected to early parenting experiences and assists in understanding the link between one's first social experience and consequential relationship, mental health and social inclusion capabilities in adulthood (Bowlby, 1988).

#### *8.1.4 Main Issues*

This research thesis has shown the reciprocal nature of being socially included, which involves the ability to regulate emotions and feel comfortable in a variety of social settings. Emotional regulation enables people to negotiate relationships confidently and with a high degree of trust and consequent expectation of fairness in all social encounters (Bowlby, 1988). This thesis, therefore, invites a more in-depth understanding of what it really means to be socially included or excluded, how this occurs and the role of ECEC approaches in creating a more inclusive society. Enhanced understanding of attachment-related behaviours may impact on the way policy incentives and ECEC practices seek to facilitate changes towards improving socially inclusive behaviours. This understanding is important, because ECEC services particularly target families at risk of social isolation (Wong & Turner, 2014).



The main challenge, in highlighting the impact of emotional influences on social behaviours, is that emerging meanings and various interpretations of the concept of social inclusion/exclusion can move the focus to suit the dominant ideas. The current policy expectation is that ECEC services are necessary to enhance early childhood development and improve social inclusion for families at risk of social isolation (DEEWR, 2009) but this goal may need to be continually revised from a theoretical and practical perspective. As this thesis has shown, more understanding of the impact of emotional influences may challenge contemporary approaches which aim to enhance social inclusion. While a focus on cognitions may support the idea that instruction and information provision can promote socially inclusive behaviours, the influence of emotions within changing contemporary ideas may need more attention.

The thesis supports Offer's (2006) suggestion, that, although dominant ideas may suit families with high levels of support and resources, new cultural practices mostly adversely affect the less privileged people in these societies. As Green and Scholes (2004) suggest, prevailing cultural ideas determine what is important but these ideas can be embraced without a consideration of how they may affect the more vulnerable members of society.

The contemporary understanding is that participation in ECEC support programs is a way to reduce disadvantage but, at the same time, social inclusion is perceived as requiring an element of choice (Social Inclusion Agenda, Australian Government, 2010). When pursuing the notion that rational choice decisions determine participation in educational and social support programs, it is possible to assume that improved education opportunities and access can reduce social exclusion (ABS study, 2009). This assumption, however, does not explain why the socially excluded are neither inclined nor choosing to attend the very programs that offer them inclusion and support.

The Tasmanian Social Inclusion Strategy (Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, 2009) emphasises that all people need access to resources and good relationships to ensure a happy, healthy productive life but, at the same time highlights concern for the high number of people at risk of social exclusion in Tasmania. The paradox is that, although the Australian Social Inclusion Agenda (Australian Government, 2010) aims to reduce discrimination and ensure economic equality by promoting social cohesion, participation in social inclusion programs is understood as a free choice; whereupon the socially excluded often choose to withdraw.

The key finding of this research is that, in examining contemporary understandings of social inclusion, it is important to acknowledge the difficulties experienced by people who lack social relationship skills; that is, their emotional regulation inabilities cause them distress in not being able to cope in unfamiliar social settings due to fears of feeling rejected (Bowlby, 1988). This thesis, therefore, proposes that the main challenge for contemporary ECEC approaches appears to revolve around the way in which social inclusion is perceived. For example, social inclusion may not necessarily be a cognitively learned skill based on the logical operation of the mind, but appears more of an intangible, immeasurable feeling based on emotions (Holmes, 1993; LeDoux, 1996). Emotions are, however, difficult to study experimentally, because they are reciprocal and contingent on other people's feelings, expectations and reactions (TenHouten, 2007). The issue is whether one believes in the notion of the reasoned actor, exercising choice and agency, albeit based on the researcher's/policy maker's ideal view of life, or whether there is a need to establish what is really happening and why (Bourdieu, 1990a). For this purpose, this thesis highlights the implications of historico-cultural social trends and the benefits of talking to practitioners who are involved in the research setting.

The ECEC goal of facilitating social inclusion seems to be achievable for many families who are already in possession of social inclusion qualities (Allman, 2013). For the socially isolated to be able to improve their psychosocial wellbeing and reduce their disadvantage, however, may require that parents become aware of how to ensure a secure attachment experience for their children (Bowlby, 1979/1988). This thesis has emphasised the implications of appropriate parenting behaviours, which, although a sensitive issue, can prevent further intergenerational psychosocial malaise, especially for disadvantaged families.

One way to assist the present generation would be, perhaps, to provide social relationship and parenting courses throughout schooling. Social skills may also be enhanced through dancing, theatrical pursuits and any activity involving social interactions. As Ladd et al. (2006) explain, people who lack the level of social skills needed for relationship success will find employment and economic attainment fraught with difficulties. The reason the subject of emotions is emphasised in this thesis, is to highlight how people need social and emotional wellbeing for them to be able to productively participate in social interchange (Bowlby, 1988). According to Bowlby (1973, 1982, 1988), this secure sense of self (autonomy) can only be attained if a person has acquired, in infancy, an ability to accurately interpret the affective state of other people. That is, a person's self-esteem/autonomy relates

to them being able to read social cues, respond appropriately to other people's emotions and regulate/control their own feelings.

Feelings are important and indicate that something needs attention (TenHouten, 2007). Emotions transmit powerful messages and require attention rather than being dismissed to follow a culturally-informed idea that earning money and gaining independence are paramount (TenHouten, 2007; Green & Scholes, 2004). Presently, a cultural and political focus on economic indices, as a way to enhance wellbeing (Bowlby, 1988), often necessitates separating children from their primary caregiver in their most sensitive emotional stage of life and, subsequently, putting their emotional wellbeing at risk (Belsky, 1988).

In Australia, ECEC programs are currently being relied upon to re-invigorate social inclusion/cohesion and enhance socio-economic wellbeing (Theobald et al., 2013). Chapter 3, of this thesis, has explained how a secure/insecure early bonding experience provides the foundation of social inclusion/exclusion. This research has explored the way popular cultural trends may perpetuate the very social problems that ECEC approaches are seeking to ameliorate (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000; Green & Scholes, 2004). As this thesis has shown, being social included, or excluded, predominantly relates to one's attachment-based social dispositions from where emotional feelings drive cognitive choices rather than *vice versa* (Holmes, 1993). Consequently, this research's theoretical framework and qualitative enquiry has revealed how social skills may be acquired and can drive social behaviours. A greater understanding of the way social inclinations emerge may move the emphasis, in ECEC approaches, from a focus on cognitions, rational choice and democratic values, towards an understanding of the emotional bases of social behaviour (Riley, 2011). Moreover, an understanding of the emotional influences on social behaviour may assist practitioners to engage with parents and children in a more meaningful and beneficial way.

While conducting interviews for this research, it became apparent that a way to avoid the reproduction of disadvantage (Bourdieu, 1984) may be for teachers and practitioners to be recruited to work in their own community. John, an education leader and lifelong resident of the area, was an example of a teacher who presented as having a strong rapport, personal understanding and connectedness with the families involved in his school. John's commitment to the families was evident during this research interview. The interview with John was held in the Principal's office, directly after school hours, and was interrupted several times by a knock on the door. John was then overheard speaking caringly with parents and students about their various concerns. Consulting with practitioners, like John,

may provide the most relevant information on the needs of families in such communities. To address the cyclic continuation of social difficulties requires that practitioners have deep understanding and strong rapport, as John had with his families, to address the complexities of parenting and social inclusion issues.

The problem of reaching isolated families remains, with outreach work being the only way to contact some families. LiL teacher, Sue, achieved success upon spending many outreach hours with one family, before they were able to become regular participants in her program. This outcome was reached only after Sue focused exclusively on this family while at least another twenty remained on her list. Another teacher, Jane, spoke less enthusiastically about her outreach role, which she experienced as being mostly patronising and unhelpful. Julie, a LiL teacher, who was also involved with CFCs, talked about the impact of differing practitioner and teacher styles. Julie's observations led her to suggest that practitioners require insight, life experiences and people skills, as well as adaptability in responding intuitively to the parents and children they assist. An issue of concern for Julie and CFC therapist, Tracey, was the many parents they observed who seemed to be experiencing difficulties in their parenting role. Tracey described the problem as mostly involving "passive parenting".

The theoretical framework of this thesis proposes that parenting plays a major part in ensuring social inclusion and aligns with the data showing the significance of emotions on social behaviour. The research question asks about contemporary understandings of social inclusion and the qualitative data, gained from practitioner and parent accounts, provide insights on how ECEC aims are pursued. The ECEC approach is to promote fairness, respect and acceptance of diversity as means to facilitate social inclusion. This thesis has explored the complexity of emotional influences, in shaping social behaviour and ensuring social inclusion.

Although the goals of ECEC approaches are to promote fairness and respect (Silver, 2010) it seems that fairness, respect and empathy abilities develop very early in life (Bowlby, 1979). A strong foundation, based on a secure attachment experience, can ensure the development of appropriate proximity-seeking strategies and consequent feelings of belonging (Bowlby, 1979). To ensure that individuals feel more socially included in the wider community requires understanding of the underlying emotional-based issues which pervade social wellbeing (Tiedens & Leach, 2004; Allman, 2013; TenHouten, 2007). This understanding has implications in social policy and ECEC approaches, which aim to enhance

social inclusion for families who are most in need. Programs like LiL and CFC may, therefore, continue to play a major role in this endeavour, by encouraging and supporting improved parent-child attachments and, ultimately, community social cohesion.

This thesis has shown that social inclusion may be a process, but one which begins at the earliest social encounter and extends throughout the pre-verbal emotional stage, after which it may become a state of varying degrees of intensity. A more nuanced understanding of the emotional component of feeling socially included may assist ECEC approaches in reducing the disadvantage experienced by those who find difficulty in integrating socially. Encouraging more parent-child interactions within programs, such as LiL and CFCs, appears to be the most beneficial way to ensure future generations are afforded the social inclusion benefits necessary for emotional, relationship and psychosocial wellbeing.

### ***POSTSCRIPT***

Prior to submitting the first draft of this thesis, in mid-2016, the Tasmanian government Minister for Education proposed lowering the school age from four to three and a half years, with the aim to improve educational outcomes for Tasmanian children. As Vinson (2009) suggests, the correlation between higher literacy skills and overall socio-emotional wellbeing cannot be presumed a causal link without taking emotional factors into account. It may, therefore, be more helpful if government educational funds were allocated to programs, such as LiL and CFCs, where parents can discover and enjoy the benefits of bonding and interacting with their babies and toddlers. Although the earlier-school-starting-age intention is to target at-risk children, the age of three and a half is already too late to prevent emotional problems impacting on a child's cognitive skills (Crittenden, 2005). Consequently, if a child has experienced an insecure attachment, even by the age of three months, their brain will already have become negatively oriented. The road to social inclusion or exclusion, as this thesis has shown, begins with the child's earliest social experiences (Bowlby, 1979; TenHouten, 2007).

## DEFINITION OF TERMS:

**Attachment process** – ensures an ability to effectively engage others, read faces, understand social cues, empathise

**Behaviourism** – this approach in social science sees the mind and brain as the same. It views teaching as a science

**Cognitive rationalism** – the view that the mind is a mental system where information is acquired through learning, transfer, motivation and engagement

**Early Intervention – preventative measure** – the aim is to reduce the risk of adverse social behaviours and increase the economic benefits gained from lower welfare and crime costs

**Emotions** – feelings, responses to other people, triggers based on long term memories

**Ethology** – imprinting, interpretation of social cues – instinct/survival value – relates to emotions and memory

**Habitus** - acquired social dispositions impacting on social interactions/success

**Holistic teaching style** – valuing differences

**Humanistic teaching style** – rewards of the self - self-concept rather than from others

**Inclusiveness in Education** – ensuring the child feels capable and competent

**Low socio-economic status (SES) areas** – classified as high-needs communities, because of disadvantage, relating to welfare dependence and unemployment levels

**Naturalistic style** – use of vignettes to show the actual conversations of participants

**Non-social pathways** – forged when brain blocks the stimulation needed to develop cognitive and social skills

**Social Inclusion** – denotes wellbeing and good relationships, conducive to gaining an education and meaningful work. By encouraging participation in social, civil and economic life, social inclusion policies serve to reduce disadvantage

**Social inclusion agenda** – advocates participation with an understanding of choice and responsibility

**Social Learning** - cultivated social competencies, acquired dispositions, adaptive strategies, which are derived from social/emotional experiences, obtained from early bonding and ensuring an ability to interpret body language and intentions of others and an awareness of the self - the basis of working models of relationships

**GLOSSARY:**

<b>FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS</b>	A UK based non-profit, multi-disciplinary group who work collaboratively with non-mental health workers whose role is to support parents. The emphasis is on communication to help parents.
<b>CFS</b>	Child and Family Services
<b>CHAPS</b>	Child Health and Parenting Services
<b>DHHS</b>	Department of Health and Human Services
<b>MAGIC 1 2 3</b>	A book used to guide parents on ways to discipline their children ( <i>1 2 3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2 – 12</i> , by Thomas Phelan).
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-government Organisations
<b>TRIPLE P PARENTING</b>	A positive parenting training program, available on-line, to assist parents with child behaviour, setting routines, positive relationships and balancing work and family.

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(FaHCSIA) Social Policy.

“APPENDIX A”

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**PRACTITIONERS**

- (1) Tell me about your role? I am interested in social inclusion which I understand to mean encouraging participation and engagement of families in programs – what are your thoughts?
- (2) What strategies are implemented in your programs to enhance social inclusion?
- (3) How do you approach behaviour, in families, which appear emotionally based, such as withdrawal, fear, hostility, mistrust?
- (4) What differences do you observe in families who find it easy to be socially included as opposed to those who find it difficult?
- (5) What are some things that parents say about the programs, especially those who are reluctant to attend?
- (6) How do you measure and track the numbers of families who attend, and do not attend programs?
- (7) What do you observe as indicators of improved social inclusion in families?
- (8) Have you observed any changes in families’ social behaviours over the years? If so, in what way?
- (9) Have you observed changes in families’ social behaviours that appear influenced by cultural trends and/or social policy incentives?
- (10) What do you see as the big issues in facilitating social inclusion through parenting support and early childhood educational means?

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**PARENTS**

- (1) Tell me about your own experiences of participation in LiL and/or CFC programs?
- (2) Tell me some of the things you observe in other families who seem less interested in participating in LiL and/or CFC programs?
- (3) What, if any, are the big issues around participating in LiL and/or CFC programs?

“APPENDIX B”

**INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (using pseudonyms)**

**PRACTITIONERS – 3 Principals, 4 teachers, 2 early childhood coordinators, 1 music therapist, 6 social inclusion workers/therapists (n = 16)**

3 x Principals of primary schools, one each in North-west, Northern and Southern Tasmania (John, Bridget, Penny)

4 x LiL Teachers, two in Northern (Sally, Jane) and two in Southern Tasmania (Sue, Julie). Julie also involved with CFC, particularly focusing on parenting

1 x CFC Social worker/therapist involved in several centres in Southern Tasmania - particularly focusing on Indigenous families and parenting (Tracey)

5 x CFC Social inclusion workers, two in Northern (Jane, Josie) and three in Southern Tasmania CFCs (Vanessa, James, Raelene)

1 x CFC Music therapist involved in several centres in Northern Tasmania, particularly focusing on attachment issues (Claire)

2 x LiL Early childhood coordinators involved in Southern Tasmania - interview conducted as a pilot with information used in analyses (Mary, June)

**PARENTS – 5 LiL and 3 CFC (n= 8)**

1 x grandfather, part-time carer of grandson – regular participant of CFC in Southern Tasmania (Jack)

5 x parents – regular participants in LiL program in two separate school locations in Southern Tasmania (Sarah, Nikki, Miriam, Monika, Tess)

1 x parent and volunteer, regular participant in CFC program in North-western Tasmania (Sonja)

1 x parent, regular participant in CFC programs in Northern Tasmania (Lana)



APPENDIX C

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Tasmania Australia 7001  
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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

## Information Sheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Early Intervention Programs and Social Inclusion: Practitioners' Perspectives on Parenting

This information sheet is for practitioners and involves a study of Family, Parenting and Prior-to-School Settings

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This study will be conducted by Rosemary Ac, a PhD candidate in the School of Education, University of Tasmania, supervised by Dr Bronwyn Reynolds, a senior lecturer in Early Childhood Education. Dr Janet Dymont, a senior lecturer in Education and Dr Max Travers, senior lecturer of Sociology, will assist as secondary supervisors to the candidate. This study seeks to examine how early intervention/educational services are promoting social inclusion. The research will be carried out by means of interviews with thirty practitioners, consisting of three groups. These will include ten practitioners from government and non-government parenting support services, ten community inclusions workers from Child and Family Centres in Tasmania and ten practitioners from prior-to-school programs.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between early social learning and social inclusion by examining the work of early intervention/educational services. Social inclusion is seen as a pathway to better school participation and improved learning abilities; the key to social, educational and employment success. The growth of early intervention/educational and parenting services internationally, nationally and locally is a reflection of widespread acceptance that the early years are the crucial time to instil social skills and ensure better educational attainment. Therefore, this study will examine the way parenting, family and prior-to-school programs are promoting social inclusion. It is hoped that interviews with practitioners will provide knowledge gained from their every-day interactions with parents and their children.

You have been invited to participate because you are the people who play the most important role, in being involved on a day-to-day, face-to-face basis in early intervention/educational services.

Practitioners will be asked to provide information by answering pre-prepared questions of their observations and interactions with parents and children who attend programs and also those who are inclined to disengage or cease attendance. The interview questions are aimed at examining the way social learning and social inclusiveness are being facilitated in programs. There is no foreseeable risk of any identifiable sensitive personal or cultural issues arising from the research questions.



Participation is voluntary and there are no consequences if anyone decides not to participate or to withdraw, in which case data you have contributed to that point will also be withdrawn. Practitioner participants will not be identified nor will any parents or children. Advice of the research will be given to participants stating that no identifiable details will be contained in the study. Anonymity will be assured and participants' identities and names of the organisation/school and their contribution will be kept in a secure location at the Education faculty, University of Tasmania. The audio tapes will be kept securely by the research student in a locked brief case and stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room at the University of Tasmania. The electronic typed version will be protected on the computer by a password. After publication, the written field notes will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the Education faculty, University of Tasmania for 5 years, after which time the data will be destroyed.

The research will be conducted at a mutually suitable area at the relevant early intervention program venue. Participants should allow approximately 30 minutes for completion of the interview or discussion. Practitioners will be emailed six months after the interview to enquire about any changes that have occurred after the initial interview.

Interviews and discussions will be audio recorded and later typed and participants will have the opportunity to review and correct the transcript. For this purpose typed sheets of the written notes will be provided, by email, prior to the completion of the study so that practitioners and parents have the opportunity to peruse a transcript and review, edit, modify or withdraw any data if they require. If any quotations are included in the study their source will not be identified. Participant's names and the names of their organisation/school will not be used in the study output. No parent or child's name should be mentioned during the interview. If any names are inadvertently mentioned in the course of the interview, they will be later erased from the data. A summary of the research results will be forwarded to participants via email on completion of the study.

The benefits sought from this study are increased engagement of parents and children in early intervention programs and improved practices through better understandings of how social inclusion may be promoted and encouraged.

If you have any questions in relation to this study or if you would like a copy you can contact Rosemary Ac on email [human.ethics@utas.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@utas.edu.au). This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, please contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email [human.ethics@utas.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@utas.edu.au). The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Please quote ethics reference number H0012475.

**This information sheet is for you to keep. If you wish to participate, please sign the written consent form.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr Bronwyn Reynolds (Chief Investigator)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rosemary Ac (PhD Student)

APPENDIX D

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

## CONSENT FORM

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Early Intervention Programs and Social Inclusion: Practitioners' Perspectives on Parenting

This Consent Form is for practitioners involved in a study of Family, Parenting and Prior-to-school settings.

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves research of Parenting, Family and Prior-to-School programs. This will entail answering interview questions about practitioner observations of parents and children attending programs. The interview questions will focus on parent and child behaviours, interactions and conversations regarding their experience in the programs and motivations to attend and/or discontinue attendance. Interview questions will also relate to practitioners' perceptions of the way parenting and early intervention/educational programs achieve the aim of promoting social inclusion. Interviews will be recorded by means of audio recording and then transcribed. Interviewees will be provided with copies of their transcripts for possible editing before information is included in the study.
5. I understand that participation involves no foreseeable risks.
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for five years from the publication of the study results.
7. Any questions that I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
8. I understand that the researcher(s) will maintain confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher(s) will be used only for the purposes of the research.
9. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant.

10. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect.

11. If I so wish, I may request that any data I have supplied be withdrawn from the research.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement by Investigator**

☐

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this participant and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_